



# THE STATE OF CITIES REDUCING POVERTY

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# REPORT | THE STATE OF CITIES REDUCING POVERTY

“Because of Tamarack, Canada now has a network of cities that have the ability to interconnect and learn from each other – an essential foundation for social innovation.”<sup>1</sup>

– Alan Broadbent

## INTRODUCTION

Tamarack Institute’s Vibrant Communities – Cities Reducing Poverty (VC – CRP), since arriving on the national scene in 2002, has been building a network of cities that are united in their commitment to work comprehensively and across sectors to reduce poverty. The VC – CRP network, rooted in a Collective Impact approach, aims to reduce, prevent and ultimately eliminate poverty through leadership roundtables that are driving local strategies. The VC – CRP network, which began as an experiment involving 13 communities, now includes 176 cities represented by 61 regional partners.

As this paper details, the network’s growth from 13 to 61 members in a span of five years has led to many innovations, increased alignment across sectors, more attention to poverty across all orders of government, and an amplified collective voice on poverty that has contributed to a range of policy and systems changes.

The first part of the paper will highlight that although VC – CRP has grown and evolved, it remains deeply rooted in the core principles upon which the initial experiment was founded. Reflecting the complexity of poverty and the need to work differently, the network’s place-based initiatives seek to reduce, rather than merely alleviate, poverty. They employ a comprehensive, asset-based, multisector approach, in which community leaders are rapidly learning and adapting to change.

Part two addresses how VC – CRP’s place-based initiatives have benefited from and shaped many other movements and ideas affecting poverty reduction in the new millennium. The rise of the social innovation, financial empowerment, and Housing First movements highlighted the possibility of bold, evidence-based solutions to pressing social and economic challenges. Meanwhile, in recent years a growing number of provinces and territories have led multi-year poverty reduction strategies. National advocacy movements sought to mobilize public and political will around a vision of poverty eradication grounded in human rights and dignity. When the 2015 federal election brought a long-awaited commitment to developing a Canadian poverty reduction strategy, an end to poverty seemed for many to be a step closer to realization. Other emerging ideas, many in response to post-recession social and economic realities, have also influenced the VC – CRP and broader poverty reduction movements.

The VC – CRP network’s important contributions to poverty reduction in Canada are outlined in part three. These include the rise of multisector roundtables, which are building community will and capacity and developing local poverty reduction strategies. This momentum, in turn, has helped build champions across sectors, including mayors and other government leaders, businesses, and people with lived and living experience of poverty – all using their unique skills and expertise to effect change. Increasingly, VC – CRP members are aligning local strategies to support Indigenous reconciliation efforts, and across the

network the rapidly evolving Collective Impact theory and practice is inspiring focused action and results. Members are also advancing local innovations to shift policies and systems in order to lift people out of poverty. Specifically, they are leading local Living Wage campaigns, advancing financial empowerment, tackling housing and homelessness, and addressing barriers to affordable, accessible transportation. Through their local initiatives, they are also working to influence key policy areas such as income security, childcare and early learning, affordable post-secondary education, and predatory lending.

As part four outlines, this dynamic VC – CRP network faces challenges and opportunities. With a growing network that lacks the same funding and evaluation supports that accompanied the 2002-2012 phase of the experiment, it has been difficult to demonstrate the network’s precise overall impact on poverty in Canada. This also presents an opportunity to find ways to better support cities to produce and report poverty reduction outcomes at scale. As the network continues to grow, and more cities develop local strategies, the vital role of cities in building an equitable, vibrant, healthy and prosperous country will become even clearer. The current opportunity to align poverty reduction strategies across all levels of government means the potential for a real Collective Impact on poverty has never been greater.

## PART I – A BOLD EXPERIMENT AND A NEW IDEA

### A Bold Experiment to Reduce Poverty

Initiated in 2002 by the Tamarack Institute, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, and the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, with support and guidance from Maytree, VC – CRP was a grand experiment. Grounded in a collaborative approach to poverty reduction that reflected the complexity of the issue, it sought to test the roles that cities could play in reducing poverty. From 2002 until 2012, VC – CRP supported thirteen ‘Trail Builder’ communities to reduce poverty using a local, asset-based, comprehensive, multisector approach.

Early in the work of the VC – CRP network, it was recognized that if communities were to significantly reduce poverty, they would need to go beyond starting more food banks. Truly reducing poverty would require engaging leaders and citizens in a larger discussion about the kind of community they wanted. It would require thinking and working differently. As Sherri Torjman writes, “Poverty is a complex issue. There is no single cause and no one solution. Its successful reduction, and ideally its eradication, require a set of linked interventions undertaken by all orders of government working in collaboration with communities.”<sup>2</sup>

The design of VC – CRP provided a powerful new approach for enabling learning and change on a pan-Canadian basis. Part of what distinguished VC – CRP from other initiatives was its set of key building blocks that enabled the project to engage simultaneously in place-based action for poverty reduction, ongoing learning and substantive policy change. Its unique architecture gave it both local and national presence: a practical and powerful combination.

On one hand, the initiative highlighted that the effort to combat poverty in Canada had stalled, arguing that the persistence of poverty in a country of such wealth is unacceptable. On the other, it has refocused attention on a compelling goal that addressed the aspiration of many Canadians: not just alleviating poverty but reducing its incidence. And it offered hope for a way forward: place-based, comprehensive, multisector strategies for poverty reduction. Finally, both at the pan-Canadian level and in local communities, the initiative was creating a safe space for people to explore new possibilities. Many of the principles and beliefs guiding VC – CRP specifically focused on creating a context that encouraged cities to search for new ways of doing things.

Between 2002 and 2012, the initial thirteen Trail Builders produced outcomes that far exceeded expectations: nearly 440,000 poverty reducing benefits impacting more than 200,000 households. In 2012, the Tamarack Institute, with Maytree and McConnell, re-envisioned the 13 original participating communities as Vibrant Communities Canada. The goal was to provide an open source for the initial ideas and learnings on poverty reduction. Membership was also opened up to allow for a natural growth in which member cities would join a pan-Canadian learning community with multiple supports. The goals were to grow VC – CRP to scale and create a large movement for change in cities and communities across Canada. At the time of writing, VC – CRP membership includes 61 municipal regions representing 176 cities.

Key Numbers in Vibrant Communities
439,435 poverty reducing benefits to 202,931 households in Canada
256 poverty reducing initiatives completed or in progress by local Trail Builders
\$22.8 million invested in local Trail Builder activity
2,278 organizations partnering in Trail Builder communities
1,539 individuals playing substantial roles including 840 people who are living in poverty
53 substantive government policy changes

## A New Idea: Vibrant Communities – Cities Reducing Poverty

This decision to focus on cities reducing poverty was not about minimizing the importance of government action on poverty, but rather about re-envisioning a role for cities in which they are recognized as sites of vibrancy, empowerment, potential, and resources – aspects that can be overlooked when the sole aim is to effect top-down, government-led change. Accordingly, the VC – CRP movement is grounded in five interrelated principles that help members to learn together while taking local action:

- 1) Poverty reduction focus,
- 2) Comprehensive thinking and action,
- 3) Multisector collaboration,
- 4) Community asset building, and
- 5) Community learning and change.



### Poverty Reduction Focus

The VC – CRP members are intentional in their focus on poverty *reduction*, rather than *alleviation*. This means organizing efforts around pursuing programs, systems, and policy changes that would result in lifting people out of poverty, not merely making living in poverty somewhat less harsh. Shifting this focus from poverty alleviation to reduction requires new ways of framing efforts at addressing poverty; an often-used mantra is, “We want less poor not better poor”. The poverty reduction focus is central to the systems change thinking that drives many of the program innovations.

### Comprehensive Thinking and Action

Members of the VC – CRP network use a comprehensive lens to work on and learn about poverty. Using a Collective Impact approach in place-based work on poverty reduction means setting community-wide goals and aspirations, and truly thinking and acting across systems. It is about creating community knowledge that is grounded in addressing the interrelated root causes – rather than the symptoms – of poverty. For this reason, member cities gravitate to the process and thinking around the Collective Impact approach in which cities form a common agenda and shared measurement and then form responses to poverty that engage multiple sectors to develop mutually reinforcing activities. As they work across issues and sectors continuous communication is vital. Most cities form a backbone structure that includes a leadership roundtable, a small staff, and action teams to support large-scale collaborations.

### Multisector Collaboration

A key component of VC – CRP is an intentional, strategic form of collaboration aimed at addressing complexity and authentically understanding poverty from the perspective of four broad sectors: people with lived and living experience of poverty, businesses, government, and the not-for-profit/charitable sector. A multisector approach recognizes the responsibility each sector had to reduce poverty. Multisector leadership also facilitates building a broad-based constituency for change and ensures that poverty reduction strategies reflect the interconnected nature of poverty. Most importantly, the multisector approach reflects the reality that each of the four sectors brings unique skills, resources,



perspectives, and expertise. Working across sectors leads to more innovative approaches to poverty reduction that would not be possible if only one sector were driving the change.

### Community Asset Building

Central to the VC – CRP approach is a focus on local action that is grounded in a strengths-based approach. That is, local leadership roundtables form to lead the initiatives in cities focused on framing the issue of poverty in a way that inspires diverse segments of the population and unlocks community assets. Rooted in an asset-based approach to community development, the VC – CRP approach reflects the reality that communities are abundant with resources, ideas, and solutions that are waiting to be tapped: a shift from the mindset of solving a poverty problem to building on the strong economic and social infrastructure already in place.

### Community Learning and Change

A fifth core principle, the commitment to creating a culture of ongoing learning and adapting to change, reflects the complexity of poverty and the reality that its expression varies across communities. Despite the variation in goals, structures and strategies, consistent across VC – CRP members is a commitment to learning and change over the long-term. This focus often requires the development of frameworks for change, which present the big picture of how communities plan on getting where they want to go. It also involves being active in the learning community and participating in coaching, communities of practice, online learning, attending annual events and contributing to publications. A vast body of knowledge has been generated through this process.

These five principles remain a strong foundation across the network. As a movement, however, VC – CRP has grown up within and alongside many other significant movements and ideas in the new millennium, which the following section will explore.



## PART II - POVERTY REDUCTION IN CANADA IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

### Introduction

The VC – CRP movement has unfolded against the backdrop of unprecedented social, economic, cultural, scientific, technological and environmental changes in the new millennium. This section does not attempt an exhaustive account of these changes but rather highlights some of the movements and emerging ideas that have been most important in shaping and explaining the VC – CRP movement and broader developments in poverty reduction in Canada.

Social innovation, which inspired the creation of Tamarack and VC – CRP, has been an impetus for many other approaches, policies and movements. The financial empowerment movement has also contributed to the poverty reduction landscape, as has Housing First's growing foothold in Canada as a promising approach for ending chronic homelessness. Meanwhile, as national advocacy movements coordinated action and dialogue toward poverty eradication, the provinces and territories increasingly developed comprehensive, multi-year poverty reduction strategies. In 2015, the federal government announced a long-awaited commitment to develop a Canadian poverty reduction strategy. Social and economic realities, particularly following the 2008-2009 recession, caused many emerging ideas to gain traction.

The VC – CRP movement has contributed to, benefited from, and been shaped by all of these movements and emerging ideas. The open-source VC – CRP learning platform has allowed place-based poverty reduction initiatives to rapidly share ideas, innovations, and strategies across the network, and respond quickly to new ideas, movements, and developments across the poverty reduction landscape.

### Provincial and Territorial Poverty Reduction Strategies

The VC – CRP movement, with its emphasis on engaging all orders of government in poverty reduction, has been a consistent collective voice calling on provinces and territories to develop and implement comprehensive poverty reduction strategies that include clear targets and timelines. The call for strategies has often been accompanied by a call for legislation on poverty that commits all subsequent governments to targets and timelines. Remarkably, every province and territory in Canada now either has or is in the process of developing, a poverty reduction strategy or action plan. These jurisdictions, while no doubt influenced by growing community pressure to act on poverty, were not content to wait on the sidelines until a federal strategy was developed; they were compelled to take action using the policy levers at their disposal.

The rise of provincial and territorial strategies to reduce poverty began in earnest in 2002 with Québec's *Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*, which was followed by the 2004-2010 *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*. Several provinces and territories, often drawing on emergent approaches and lessons learned, have since developed multi-year strategies with accompanying legislation requiring all governments to have strategies with targets and timelines. Further, some jurisdictions have developed specific funding streams to support innovative, place-based poverty reduction initiatives. Ontario's \$50 million, 6-year Local Poverty Reduction Fund, for example, supports innovative, community-based projects that align with the provincial strategy.

Formal provincial or territorial strategies, of course, are not guarantees that poverty will be reduced. Ongoing advocacy is required to ensure these strategies are robust and effective, and the VC – CRP network continues to advance this work.

## The Road to a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy

Within the VC – CRP movement, securing a strong federal poverty reduction strategy has long been seen as a critical step on the path to ending poverty in Canada.

Despite the unanimous, all-party pledge in 1989 in the House of Commons to end child poverty by the year 2000, the early years of the new millennium did not yield promising results. Poverty rates remained high and there seemed to be very little political will to embrace a national poverty reduction agenda. Still, important work was taking place to make the case for federal attention to poverty. The Senate Subcommittee's 2009 report, *In From the Margins: A Call to Action on Poverty, Housing and Homelessness*, called for a federal commitment to poverty eradication and made several policy recommendations (e.g., a national child-care program, national housing strategy, increasing the Working Income Tax Benefit, studying Guaranteed Annual Income). The work of VC – CRP members was also referenced several times throughout the report.

The 2015 election of a new federal government brought with it a long-awaited commitment to a national poverty reduction strategy. Public consultations to inform the strategy were held throughout 2017. Members of VC – CRP were important contributors to this process, which revealed many common issues of concern, including housing and homelessness, income security and employment, food insecurity, the impact of poverty on groups disproportionately affected, and reconciliation and justice for Indigenous people.<sup>3</sup>

On August 21, 2018, the Government of Canada released *Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy – Opportunity for All*. The Strategy has a stated vision of ending poverty and is grounded in three pillars: dignity, opportunity and inclusion, and resilience and security. From a policy perspective, the Strategy largely builds upon investments the Government had previously identified as integral to reducing poverty. These include the Canada Child Benefit, the Canada Workers Benefit (an enhanced version of the former Working Income Tax Benefit), Guaranteed Income Supplement increases, and the National Housing Strategy.

Core elements of the Strategy include a goal of reducing poverty by 20% by 2020 and 50% by 2030 (using 2015 as a baseline); the creation of an Official Poverty Line (an updated version of the Market

*With many provinces and territories now in more advanced stages of their poverty reduction strategies, there are unique opportunities to explore how these can align with community-level strategies. The Government of New Brunswick established a Crown corporation, the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation (ESIC), to facilitate the implementation of Overcoming Poverty Together: The New Brunswick Economic and Social Inclusion Plan. On the ground, this involves ESIC working in collaboration with 12 Community Inclusion Networks (CINs), which use the multisectoral approach pioneered by VC – CRP. Four of these CINs, in fact, are VC-CRP members: Greater Fredericton Social Innovation, Living SJ (Saint John), Vibrant Communities Charlotte County, and WA Action in Westmorland Albert County. With support from the ESIC, the CINs develop regional plans that align with the provincial plan's priorities and goals, which include reducing income poverty by 25% and deep income poverty by 50%.*

Basket Measure); the adoption of a working definition of poverty;<sup>4</sup> the creation of an online dashboard of indicators; and the creation of an independent National Advisory Council on Poverty with a mandate of ongoing consultation and tracking and reporting on results. Significantly, the Strategy will also involve the introduction of federal legislation, the Poverty Reduction Act, to enshrine into law Canada's Official Poverty Line, its poverty reduction targets, and the role of the Advisory Council.

The Strategy's emphasis on collaboration across sectors and orders of government signals important opportunities for the VC – CRP network as the implementation process unfolds.

*In 2018, the Government of Canada completed the public engagement process to inform its Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy, and the results are contained in the What We Heard About Poverty So Far report. The VC – CRP network played an integral role in this national engagement process. Partnering with Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), 27 VC – CRP members hosted 33 consultations reaching 600 participants across 9 provinces and territories. This engagement from the VC – CRP network no doubt helped bring a coordinated message about the importance of a comprehensive strategy for Canada.*

## Envisioning an End to Poverty: The Voice of National Advocacy Movements

Over the years, national advocacy movements have helped to amplify the call for federal leadership on poverty. Many VC – CRP cities, recognizing the importance of a strong role for the federal government in poverty reduction, support national advocacy efforts aimed at building public and political will for an end to poverty in Canada.

Campaign 2000 and Dignity for All are two influential national advocacy efforts in Canada. Campaign 2000, which formed in 1991 in response to the lack of government attention to child poverty, is a coalition with 120 partners that consistently calls for government action and public support to end child and family poverty in Canada. It tracks progress – through annual report cards – on the House of Commons All-Party Resolution in 1989, which famously pledged to end child poverty by the year 2000.

In 2009, Canada Without Poverty (formerly the National Anti-Poverty Organization) and Citizens for Public Justice joined forces to found Dignity for All: The Campaign for a Poverty-Free Canada. Dignity for All has three primary aims: the creation of a comprehensive federal poverty elimination plan; the introduction and implementation of a federal *Anti-Poverty Act*; and the collection and allocation of enough federal revenue to provide all Canadians with social and economic security. After extensive community engagement sessions, Dignity for All released *A National Anti-Poverty Plan for Canada* in 2015, which set out a vision for poverty eradication in Canada. In addition to making policy recommendations in the areas of income security, housing and homelessness, health, food security, early childhood education and care, and jobs and employment, the plan advanced a human rights-based approach to poverty elimination.

As the plan stated, “Human rights transform issues of homelessness, poverty and hunger from being solely about economic deprivation to being about equal citizenship and dignity. A human rights approach understands that socio-economic deprivation occurs in large part because of the devaluing of the rights of the most vulnerable leading to particular policy and program choices and decisions.”<sup>5</sup>

Maytree has also been playing a key role in advancing a rights-based approach to poverty reduction, and there are signs of increased willingness by governments to incorporate this lens into formal strategies: two notable examples are Canada’s First Poverty Reduction Strategy and the National Housing Strategy.

### Imagining and Creating Social Good: The Social Innovation Movement

In the early 2000s, Tamarack emerged alongside a cluster of organizations and thought leaders who were advancing social innovation in Canada. While Collective Impact was popularized with the landmark 2011 Kania and Kramer article, the VC – CRP movement had been using the process in its pan-Canadian effort to innovate at the community level through comprehensive, place-based poverty reduction initiatives. VC – CRP was an example of community innovation within the broader social innovation movement. As Sylvia Cheuy writes in *The Community Innovation Imperative*, “As dynamic ‘living labs’, communities offer the perfect container for innovation,” which can only be effective when there exists “an appreciation of both the issue one is hoping to address, as well as a deep understanding of the unique characteristics of the community – the place and the people within it – where the innovation will be implemented.”<sup>6</sup>

In addition to Tamarack, numerous organizations were propelling Canada’s social innovation movement forward:

- Al Etmarksi and Vicki Cammack founded the **PLAN Institute (PLAN)** in 1999; civic leaders formed the **MaRS Discovery District** in 2000;
- **Ashoka Canada** was launched in 2002 to cultivate a network of Canadian changemakers; Tonya Surman launched the **Centre for Social Innovation** in 2004; and
- The **J.W. McConnell Family Foundation**, which started initiating its own programs under the leadership of Tim Broadhead in 1995, partnered with the University of Waterloo, MaRS, and PLAN to form **Social Innovation Generation (SiG)** in 2007. Working across sectors, SiG fosters social innovation to address social and ecological challenges, with a focus on achieving impact, durability and scale. According to SiG, “Social Innovation assumes a world where ultimate good in society can be not only imagined but also created. It is an initiative, product or process that profoundly changes beliefs, basic routines, resource and authority flow of any social system in the direction of greater resilience. Successful social innovations have durability, impact and scale.”<sup>7</sup>

Within the broader social innovation movement, the role of social enterprise and social finance have made a mark on the social economy and poverty reduction landscape, and governments at all levels have taken notice. The federal government is in the midst of developing a Canadian Social Innovation and Social Finance Strategy to identify new ways to solve complex social problems.<sup>8</sup> Across Canada, provinces and

“Human rights transform issues of homelessness, poverty and hunger from being solely about economic deprivation to being about equal citizenship and dignity.”

territories are investing in initiatives aimed at spurring innovation generally, with some developing strategies specific to social innovation and social enterprise. At the local level, the community economic development model – led by the Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet) – has helped inform how communities and municipalities are taking place-based action to address complex social, economic and environmental challenges.

Conceived by social innovators, Tamarack and the VC – CRP network is continuing to shape and benefit from the evolving social innovation landscape. As Alan Broadbent states, “Because of Tamarack, Canada now has a network of cities that have the ability to interconnect and learn from each other – an essential foundation for social innovation.”<sup>9</sup>

## The Financial Empowerment Movement Takes Hold

Across the VC – CRP network, a broad range of financial empowerment initiatives are being employed as part of cities’ broader poverty reduction strategies. Gaining momentum in the 1990s, the financial empowerment movement is grounded in a commitment to community-based strategies that aim to improve financial outcomes for those living on low-income. Financial empowerment, which is meant to complement other poverty reduction approaches, typically refers to the following five types of interventions: financial information, education and counselling; help accessing income boosting benefits and tax credits; safe and affordable financial products and services; access to savings and asset building opportunities; and consumer awareness and protection.<sup>10</sup>

Prosper Canada – known at the time as Self Employment Development Initiatives (SEDI) – was launched in 1986 to provide self-employment training to people living on low-income. Throughout the 1990s, Prosper Canada advanced numerous self-employment initiatives and in 1997 first introduced the idea of asset-building as a poverty reduction strategy. In 2000, Prosper Canada, in partnership with Human Resources Development Canada, ten Canadian communities, RBC, and the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, launched Learn\$Save, which was a 10-year, \$34 million



demonstration project involving individual development accounts. The success of this experiment gave rise to a federal government social innovation, the Canada Learning Bond and Canada Education Savings Grant, which many VC – CRP multisector roundtables are promoting.<sup>11</sup>

Prosper Canada has been at the forefront of promoting financial empowerment and coordinating financial literacy efforts across Canada. In 2004, Prosper launched the Independent Living Account demonstration project in Edmonton, Toronto, and Fredericton, and in 2005 was commissioned by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation to design a national demonstration project with 2,000 accounts across up to 10 sites to help those on low-income save for home ownership.

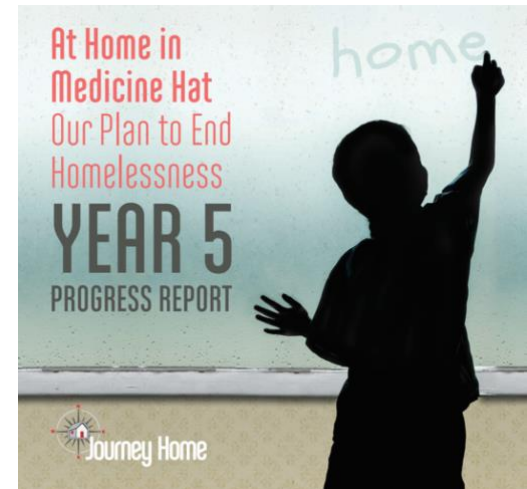
In 2016, Prosper Canada secured a federal investment of over \$5 million to support five non-profit Financial Empowerment Champions, which set a collective goal of helping to improve financial outcomes for 175,000 Canadians with low incomes. VC – CRP member Vibrant Communities Calgary is part of the



collaborative led by Momentum, which is one of the five Financial Empowerment Champions. As will be discussed shortly, Calgary is demonstrating remarkable outcomes on financial empowerment. Such examples will continue to inspire VC – CRP members to advance a range of financial empowerment initiatives that help lift people out of poverty.

## Ending Chronic Homelessness: The Power of Housing First

As many place-based initiatives across the VC – CRP network have recognized, poverty reduction strategies have a critical role to play in addressing the homelessness crisis. In 2009, VC – CRP member city, Medicine Hat, Alberta, pledged to end homelessness. In 2015, making good on its promise, the City made headlines as the first in Canada to end chronic homelessness, drawing widespread attention to the transformative potential of the Housing First model. In contrast to the “treatment-first” model, in which people experiencing homelessness are typically provided emergency or supportive housing until they are deemed ‘ready’ to live independently, Housing First focuses on rapidly moving people who experience homeless into independent and permanent housing. Recognizing the need for individualized supports, the approach is oriented toward supporting recovery and is based on principles of consumer choice and self-determination.<sup>12</sup>



The adoption of Housing First in Canada was influenced by the Pathways to Housing model, initiated in New York in 1992, which had produced strong evidence for the model’s effectiveness. Housing First began to take hold in Canada in the 2000s. The City of Toronto’s 2005 Streets to Homes initiative demonstrated solid results using the approach. In 2008, several Alberta cities began integrating Housing First approaches into their ten-year plans to end homelessness. The Mental Health Commission of Canada’s *At Home/Chez Soi* demonstration project received a \$110 million federal grant to study Housing First in five Canadian cities from 2009 until 2013, adding to the interest and momentum with further evidence of the approach’s effectiveness. When the Government of Canada renewed its five-year Homelessness Partnering Strategy in 2013, communities were required to integrate Housing First into their services aimed at homelessness prevention.<sup>13</sup>

The Medicine Hat story underscores the power of a place-based strategy to tackle a complex, persistent social challenge. Currently, many VC – CRP members are leading or supporting efforts, rooted in the Housing First philosophy, aiming to end homelessness in their communities. Government support in this area is growing. In its National Housing Strategy, the Government of Canada committed \$2.2 billion to reduce chronic homelessness in Canada by 50% over the next 10 years.

## Social Movements and the Equity Imperative

Prominent twenty-first century social movements have underscored how poverty is connected to other social and economic inequities, and how different groups experience the effects of these inequities.

The Occupy movement's focus on extreme wealth and income inequality was a precursor to the grassroots Fight for \$15 and Fairness campaign across North America. The latter campaign has been significant for its bottom-up, worker-led approach that has highlighted the disproportionate impact of low-wage work on women and racialized workers. This approach, which has attracted support from a broad range of allies, has helped dispel the myth that work is a guaranteed pathway out of poverty.

Idle No More emerged in 2012 over concerns about how federal omnibus legislation would negatively impact Indigenous communities. Among the movement's many influences, it has reinforced poverty's links to colonialism, racism, destruction of governance systems and local economies, environmental degradation, incarceration, and gendered violence. Black Lives Matter, in naming and organizing against numerous forms of anti-black racism, has played a key role in demonstrating how the fights for racial and economic justice are intertwined.

While these social movements vary in their origins, strategies and tactics, they have all contributed to a deeper, intersectional analysis of poverty. For anti-poverty advocates, this analysis is critical to redressing poverty's disproportionate impact on certain groups. Citizens for Public Justice has reported on the disproportionate rates of poverty among Indigenous people, new immigrants and refugees, single-parent families (the vast majority of which are female-led), and people with disabilities.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the Colour of Poverty / Colour of Change network has drawn attention to the racialization of poverty,<sup>15</sup> while the Canadian Coalition Against LGBTQ+ Poverty has highlighted that LGBTQ+ communities are at greater risk of poverty and homelessness.<sup>16</sup>

## Emerging Ideas

Particularly over the last decade, in response to the social and economic realities following the 2008-2009 recession, several new or re-emerging ideas have captured the imagination of VC – CRP members and many others who are working to address poverty in Canada. While there are other ideas that could have been included in this section, the following were selected for their relevance to the VC – CRP movement.

### *Fair Wages and Decent Work*

Following the recession of 2008-2009, poverty reduction efforts have increasingly been viewed against the backdrop of rising wealth and income inequality. The Occupy movement was a catalyst for the rise in grassroots campaigns to combat low-wage, precarious work. When fast food workers in New York City walked off their jobs in 2012 to demand \$15 an hour and a union, this marked the beginning of the Fight for \$15 movement that would spread across North America. In Canada, this movement has been a driving force behind commitments from governments in Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario to implement a \$15 minimum wage. Living Wage campaigns, also advancing a narrative of fairness and the role of decent work in promoting health and dignity, have highlighted the role that local governments and businesses can play in combatting working poverty.



### *Basic Income and Re-thinking Income Security*

Meanwhile, within governments and other segments of society, there is growing interest in the potential role that a basic income might play in reducing and potentially eliminating poverty. Ontario's three-year Basic Income Pilot – now slated for cancellation in 2019 – was attracting media attention.<sup>17</sup> Related, emerging ideas to support increased income security include re-thinking traditional approaches to social assistance, including providing more benefits (e.g., dental, prescription) to those who are working poor. Increased attention to all of these ideas reflects broad concerns about the future of work and the need for bold responses to new economic realities, such as rising precarious employment, a shrinking middle class, wage stagnation and income inequality.

### *Social Determinants of Health and the Cost of Poverty*

These ideas draw from a growing evidence base on the social and economic imperative of creating more equitable, inclusive societies. In 2010, *Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts* drew attention to the significant ways in which a person's health is shaped by such social conditions as income, employment education and housing.<sup>18</sup> Within the VC – CRP network, the SDOH lens has been valuable in supporting comprehensive, systemic approaches to poverty – rather than approaches that focus primarily on individual behaviour change – and helping to make the economic case for poverty reduction. For example, the Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership was a partner on the Poverty Costs campaign in Saskatchewan, which pegged the cost of poverty in the province at \$3.8 billion. This campaign was an important part of the collective effort to push for a comprehensive poverty reduction plan for the province, which was introduced in 2016.



### *The Role of Cities in Advancing Shared Prosperity*

Cost of poverty analyses and SDOH approaches have also been useful at the city level. While cities certainly do not possess all of the policy levers required to address the aforementioned issues, they acutely feel the implications of these and other social and economic challenges. Accordingly, the new millennium has seen renewed attention to the integral role that cities play in advancing shared prosperity. A compelling case for the role of cities was laid out in the 2014 VC – CRP document, *Creating Shared Prosperity: Cities that Lead Succeed*. The Federation of Canada Municipalities (FCM) partnered with VC – CRP in recent years to highlight how local poverty reduction efforts complement a broader cities agenda. Given cities' role in recreation, social services, housing, public health, local economic development, and many other domains, initiatives have also arisen – e.g., FCM's Quality of Life Reporting System; the Canadian Council on Social Development's Community Social Data Strategy – to support the need for quality local data.

The commitment among VC – CRP cities to continually learn while adapting to a rapidly changing poverty reduction landscape has meant that these ideas – and many others – often find expression within local poverty reduction efforts.

## Conclusion

Though certainly not the only ones to do so, the movements and ideas discussed here have made important contributions to the development of the VC – CRP movement. Many in the VC – CRP network are drawing on social innovation, financial empowerment, and Housing First to generate impactful solutions to persistent challenges in their communities. Place-based poverty reduction initiatives are also strengthened by connecting the local work to a broader vision of ending poverty, which national advocacy movements have offered.

Likewise, the work taking place across the VC – CRP network has no doubt influenced the unique expression and trajectory of those other key movements and ideas that are part of the poverty reduction landscape in the new millennium. Many factors were certainly responsible for the remarkable rise in provinces and territories ushering in poverty reduction strategies over the last fifteen years, but this was facilitated and accelerated, at least in part, by a growing network of cities with multisector leadership roundtables calling for such strategies. Indeed, the same might be said about the conditions leading up to the long-awaited commitment to a federal poverty reduction strategy. While it can be difficult to say precisely how the VC – CRP network influenced such changes, the next section highlights several areas in which the specific contributions of the network to poverty reduction are much clearer.

## PART III – HAVING IMPACT: VC – CRP’S ROLE IN POVERTY REDUCTION

### Introduction

The VC – CRP network has influenced the Canadian poverty reduction landscape in many ways. Its use of the Collective Impact approach has aligned many local efforts toward a common, measurable poverty reduction goal. By building community will and capacity, local initiatives create the foundation from which to develop and implement multisector poverty reduction strategies. This approach has helped empower a growing number of mayors and business leaders to become champions for poverty reduction. Increasingly, people with lived and living experience have created spaces in which to contribute their leadership and wisdom to effect change. The network has also developed innovations that aim to reduce poverty and further reconciliation efforts related to Indigenous communities.

Further, the VC – CRP movement has helped bring about changes to a range of policy and systems at the local level. These include: advancing the Living Wage movement, which has played a role in shaping minimum wage reform efforts; developing financial empowerment interventions; developing many affordable housing solutions and leading and supporting efforts to address chronic homelessness using the Housing First approach; and bringing forward a range of innovative approaches to address transportation barriers. Recognizing the need to shape policies across all levels of government, the VC – CRP network has been active in several areas that are critical to lifting people out of poverty. These include income security, child care and early learning, affordable post-secondary education, and predatory lending practices. The next section describes VC – CRP’s links to Collective Impact.

### Collective Impact

When John Kania and Mark Kramer published their 2011 article *Collective Impact* in the Stanford Social Innovation Review,<sup>19</sup> phase one of Tamarack’s VC experiment was wrapping up. In practice, Tamarack’s VC initiative had been using the methodology – though with different terminology – described by Kania and Kramer on a national scale, with astounding results: nearly 440,000 benefits were produced to help over 200,000 households between 2002 and 2012.<sup>20</sup> Their article, however, brought considerable attention and momentum to a highly structured form of multisector collaboration that was showing promise in helping communities realize measurable, population-level results on complex social challenges.

Collective Impact theory and practice continues to evolve rapidly, with several Tamarack thought leaders making important contributions. Recent examples include the *Collective Impact 3.0* article, written by Liz Weaver and Mark Cabaj, which advances several key shifts in the five conditions for Collective Impact. Paul Born’s *How to Develop a Common Agenda for Collective Impact: A 5-Step Guide* supports practitioners, using examples and Born’s experiences as an expert coach, through the process of building a common agenda.

Despite the growing popularity of Collective Impact, it was not until 2017 that the methodology was subjected to a rigorous fieldwide study. Hired by the Collective Impact Forum, ORS Impact and Spark Policy Institute set out to better understand the extent to which, and under what conditions, Collective Impact initiatives contribute to systems and population changes. The study involved 25 Collective Impact initiatives across North America and revealed important learnings; for example, it is worth investing considerable time and energy to get the backbone structure and common agenda right; population changes can result from many different types of systems changes; and the critical role that developing a shared social justice lens and building equity capacity – including engaging people with lived experience in leadership roles – play in producing strong equity outcomes.<sup>21</sup>

Notably, two VC – CRP members, Living SJ and the Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership (SPRP), were participants in the fieldwide study. In both cases, Collective Impact has provided a valuable methodology for re-aligning local poverty reduction efforts. Faced with child poverty rates of 33%, Saint John’s community leaders came together in 2014 to embark on a Social Renewal Strategy. Following extensive research, analysis and consultations, Living SJ adopted a clear goal of ending generational poverty. Using a Collective Impact approach has helped the SPRP align its work as it develops a renewed poverty reduction plan for Saskatoon that incorporates shared measurement across its constellation model, a focus on equity and human rights, and a continued emphasis on strategic government engagement to bring about policy change.

*The VC – CRP approach, attracting interest from outside of Canada, was recently applied with great results in Iowa. The United Way of Central Iowa, in an effort to create a more equitable society, embarked on a Collective Impact process in 2014. This involved a widespread listening campaign and a convening of the top 100 community leaders to implement a community vision for reducing poverty. Through this process, the Central Iowa OpportUNITY Community Plan was created. By December 2017, United Way of Central Iowa was able to announce that the community’s poverty rate had declined for the first time in years. Specifically, between 2015 and 2016, the poverty rate dropped from 11.5 to 11.1, meaning 1,265 individuals had moved above the United States Federal Poverty Line.*

With strong roots in the Collective Impact approach, the VC – CRP network will remain at the forefront of this promising and rapidly evolving approach to community change. Collective Impact’s long-term focus requires a solid foundation of community will and capacity.

## Building Community Will and Capacity

One contribution of the VC – CRP movement has been its ability to generate place-based momentum and action on poverty across Canada. Reflecting on the 2002-2012 phase of work, Jamie Gamble writes, “In many respects, the story of Vibrant Communities is fundamentally about strengthening the will and capacity of communities to tackle poverty.”<sup>22</sup>

Often, this process starts with local conversations between “unusual suspects” that spark new ideas and approaches. The VC – CRP approach has unlocked tremendous energy in cities across Canada, perhaps in part because it starts with creating space for people to see poverty with fresh eyes. As leaders from

across sectors come together and begin learning about the issue and its unique impact on their community, clarity about the barriers and possible solutions begins to emerge. Early on, for many cities, the intuition is to “go where the energy is,” which of course implies the need to first explore where those critical pockets of energy reside. What this looks like inevitably varies according to the local context: “Some communities...have a well-developed infrastructure for addressing social issues, a strong culture of collaboration, and a policy environment that tends to support progressive action. Other communities, meanwhile, need to build and nurture such conditions.”<sup>23</sup>

The process of building will and capacity requires communities to assess what dimensions of poverty, if addressed, will make the greatest impact and inspire engagement and action among an influential cross-section of leaders. As communities deepen their understanding of the local realities of poverty, data and narratives can be shared, possible solutions often begin to emerge, and the right mix of organizations and leaders can help attract new resources in support of a community-wide poverty reduction effort.<sup>24</sup> Whether communities are inspired to develop interventions at a programmatic or systemic level, or some combination of the two, they can only be effective if there is sufficient community will and capacity.

A strong multisector leadership roundtable, integral to building community will and capacity, brings attention to the issue and changes the ways in which partners work together to tackle the issue. “When pursued successfully, this process results in a heightened level of community will and capacity, leading to improved coordination, analysis, awareness, and, ultimately, action.”<sup>25</sup>

The process of building community will and capacity, because it requires a high level of engagement across sectors and involves gathering in-depth information about local poverty, provides the necessary foundation from which to build a local strategy.

*The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (HRPR), co-convened in 2005 by the City of Hamilton and the Hamilton Community Foundation, mobilized a broad cross-section of partners around the bold aspiration to make Hamilton “the best place to raise a child”. The HRPR identified five “critical points of investment,” built upon several existing collaborative community tables to drive and coordinate the work, and developed numerous effective program, system and policy interventions. With high profile business leader Mark Chamberlain as a key champion, and strong support from local media, the HRPR was on its way to becoming a consistent force for change in the community.*

## The Rise of Local Poverty Reduction Strategies

Given the complexity of poverty, the VC – CRP approach facilitates development of strategies that fit the realities of local contexts. Determining what type of strategy to develop is shaped by the unique local landscape, including the extent of the community’s will and capacity and the nature of any pre-existing efforts to address poverty. Accordingly, “communities need the flexibility to design poverty reduction plans that are tailored to local conditions, attuned to the perspectives of the partners they are seeking to engage, and responsive to changes over time. Cookie cutter solutions not only are inappropriate, but they also are not feasible.”<sup>26</sup>

As the VC – CRP network grows and evolves, there is a deepening understanding across the learning community of what the poverty reduction strategy development process requires. Cities in startup mode will convene a roundtable, look for resources, engage partners, assess community readiness, and

do initial sense-making around local poverty data. The next stage, exploration, involves developing a common agenda, vision and principles, defining poverty, identifying priorities, and developing a strategy that includes targets and timelines. As cities enter the development stage, the focus shifts to monitoring and communicating collective progress and moving from strategy to implementation. At the maturity stage, cities are concerned about issues of sustainability, using evaluation for strategic learning, and possibly contemplating renewing their poverty reduction efforts.

Once a community establishes its definition of poverty, understands key data and issues, and reaches a common poverty reduction agenda, it selects the most suitable type of strategy. In a recent paper, *What We Know So Far About the Strategy Continuum*, Mark Cabaj draws on Henry Mintzberg's model to describe three types of strategies along a continuum – emergent, umbrella and detailed – that are often employed within multi-stakeholder community change efforts. Emergent strategies, which focus on testing or experimentation, can work well in dynamic contexts where there is pressure to act and a weaker understanding of the issue.

Umbrella strategies, such as Hamilton's framework for change discussed earlier, allows for self-organization among stakeholders while still working toward a collective goal. Detailed strategies can be valuable when the issue is well understood, there is strong agreement among stakeholders, and there is enough capacity and resources for implementation. As Cabaj notes, "Few strategies reflect purely one model. Some parts of a group's approach may be laid out in elaborate detail...while other parts might be completely emergent".<sup>27</sup>

**Few strategies reflect purely one model ... Some parts of a group's approach may be laid out in elaborate detail ... while other parts might be completely emergent.**

The strategies within the VC – CRP network span this continuum, with some simultaneously containing elements of all three types. The strategies that emerge from the VC – CRP network are typically either led by the local government, or by a community collaborative (in which the local government often plays a supporting role). Of the poverty reduction strategies currently in place within the VC – CRP network, the majority are community-led strategies; however, in recent years many local governments have developed, or are in the process of developing strategies.<sup>28</sup>

Sometimes, leadership over the strategy changes hands, as in the recent example of Edmonton. In 2014, the City of Edmonton launched the Mayor's Task Force to Eliminate Poverty, engaging more than 3000 residents and generating 400 recommendations, from which 35 priority actions were identified for inclusion in the End Poverty Edmonton Road Map.<sup>29</sup> Now, End Poverty Edmonton is a community entity supported by the City of Edmonton, the United Way Alberta Capital Region and the Edmonton Community Foundation. Regardless of who leads the strategy, the value of local governments and roundtables aligning their efforts is clear.

In several VC – CRP member cities, local governments fund the community convening entity and/or are making strategic, multi-year investments in poverty programs and initiatives. In October 2017, for example, Hamilton City Council approved a historic \$50 million, 10-year poverty reduction strategy aimed primarily at addressing affordable housing. The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction's many years of local poverty reduction work no doubt helped lay the groundwork for this significant



investment. Other examples of municipal investments in poverty reduction and prevention initiatives include: Niagara Region's investment since 2008, through the Niagara Prosperity Initiative, of \$1.5 million annually; Windsor-Essex's investment, through Pathway to Potential, of approximately \$2 million annually since 2009; and Whitehorse's Community Service Grant allocated over \$1.4 million to various community members including those on low income.

While there are several factors that can help explain the momentum for poverty reduction strategies being led by local governments, the growing leadership role of mayors is an important one.

## Mayors Reducing Poverty

Within the VC – CRP movement, building champions from across sectors have always been integral to successful local poverty reduction efforts. In recent years there has been an emerging movement of mayors leading the way on poverty reduction efforts in their cities.

Given municipalities' revenue-generating constraints, and the fact that many key policy levers for poverty reduction reside at the provincial and federal levels, we might expect to see local governments sitting on the poverty reduction sidelines. Yet, a growing number of mayors across Canada are recognizing that reducing local poverty is a critical part of any serious attempt to build prosperous, inclusive, sustainable cities. By convening multisector leaders, developing place-based innovations, and demonstrating local impact, VC – CRP members have no doubt contributed to mayors' leadership on poverty.

The recent growth of the VC – CRP network and the increased focus on aligning poverty reduction efforts across all orders of government has been influential in recruiting mayors to use their profile and influence to address poverty.

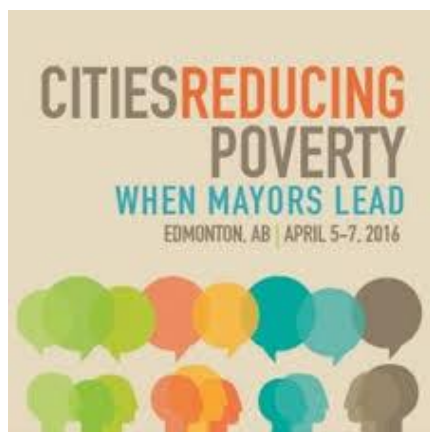
In 2015, the VC – CRP Poverty Reduction Summit in Ottawa inaugurated the national conversation on aligning poverty reduction efforts across the three orders of government. Among the keynote speakers were two high-profile, city-building mayors, Calgary's Naheed Nenshi and Edmonton's Don Iveson, who inspired the nearly 400 people in attendance with their messages and examples of bold, fearless leadership on poverty.

**“Poverty is complex. Many are afraid to tackle it. But I am not. I will elevate the profile of poverty elimination by bringing the weight of the mayor's office.”**

**- Mayor Don Iveson**







In 2016, the *Cities Reducing Poverty: When Mayors Lead* Summit in Edmonton profiled mayors and councillors from across the country who were actively working alongside VC – CRP members to build vibrant, inclusive, equitable communities. Some of the highlights included: Mayor Ted Clugston of Medicine Hat telling the story of his City putting an historic end to chronic homelessness; Mayor Iveson’s story of Edmonton’s bold poverty elimination strategy; New Westminster Mayor Jonathan Côté sharing the City’s journey to becoming the first city in Canada to adopt a Living Wage; Mayor Mel Norton highlighting efforts to end generational poverty in Saint John; and Deputy Mayor Pam McConnell providing insights into Toronto’s emerging poverty reduction strategy.

As the VC – CRP network continues to encourage mayors to use their voices to call attention to poverty, another powerful group of leaders has been taking action on poverty that is informed by their lived realities.

*In 2017, the year that Hamilton hosted the VC – CRP National Poverty Reduction Summit, the City’s Mayor Fred Eisenberger announced an historic \$50 million, 10-year poverty reduction strategy.*

## The Wisdom and Voices of People with Lived and Living Experience

The leadership of people with lived and living experience is integral to VC – CRP’s multisector approach, as these voices bring legitimacy to the process of developing local strategies. In addition to the strong equity and social justice imperative to privilege the perspectives of people with lived and living experience (“nothing about us without us”), having these leaders at the table also makes the local poverty reduction strategy stronger and more resilient.

These voices have immeasurably strengthened the poverty reduction movement in Canada. They bring unique and powerful expertise to the table, whether they are participating in leadership roles on roundtables, government consultations, or advisory committees. Indeed, they bring the context expertise that is so important to counterbalance the tendency for content experts and positional leaders to dominate the discussion and agenda. Their contributions include calling out hierarchies and power imbalances, challenging stigma and stereotypes, provoking difficult conversations that move the work forward, and sparking the development of social inclusion policies and new capacity-building opportunities.

As the VC – CRP network grows, so do the examples of people with lived and living experience joining together and taking action. Common models of organizing include speakers’ bureaus, such as Speak Now Hamilton and Poverty Talks in Calgary, which facilitate empowerment, skill-building and narrative to build awareness, empathy and challenge stereotypes. In other models, such as the Citizens’ Voice forum within Vibrant Communities Saint John’s, people with lived and living experience lead neighbourhood-based efforts to increase access to resources; in this case, promoting the Canada Learning Bond and supporting individuals with the application process.

Once people with lived and living experience have created a space in which to address poverty on their own terms, they often end up taking on a wide range of roles in the community. These roles might fluctuate to include grassroots advocacy, providing education or training to community groups and organizations, and mobilizing other people with lived and living experience to get involved.

As the next section outlines, the business community is another sector that is developing creative ways to address poverty by leveraging the skills, expertise and influence of its members.

*The perspectives of people with lived and living experience were integral to the Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership's 2017 publication, Creating a Culture of Inclusion. The SPRP was purposeful in engaging the First Voice Inclusion Action Team, which shared stories, learnings, and examples of how people with lived and living experience can enrich community through policy and practice. Drawing on this wisdom, the document offers organizations ideas for designing effective, relevant services and programs.*

## Leadership in Action: Businesses Tackle Poverty

There are many ways that the business community, a critical part of the VC – CRP multisector structure, is contributing to local poverty reduction initiatives. Across Canada, business leaders are increasingly moving beyond the traditional charitable approach. In addition to bringing their passion, insights and acumen to VC – CRP leadership roundtables, they are developing new ways to take local action, build awareness and inform policy.

Business leaders can leverage their networks to create a powerful collective voice. The Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative (BCAPI) in Saint John, for example, is a leadership table of 40 senior business leaders who are bringing their expertise and influence to bear on the fight to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. BCAPI's "cradle to career" approach involves working with priority neighbourhood schools to provide resources and opportunities that position children for success. One member of BCAPI's leadership team, entrepreneur David Alston, exemplifies the new era of business leadership on poverty. Also co-chair of Living SJ and the Chief Entrepreneur in Residence for the Government of New Brunswick, Alston is part of a local movement to disrupt generational poverty by "testing new models, measuring outcomes, making quick adjustments and having the fortitude to kill an idea if it doesn't produce (or scale it up if it does)."<sup>30</sup>



David Alston, Living SJ's Donna Gates, and New Brunswick Premier Brian Gallant

As employers, businesses can play a critical poverty reduction role by modelling equitable, inclusive hiring practices and championing Living Wages and other policies that advance decent work. Vancity Credit Union in Vancouver has been a vocal proponent of the Living Wage as an important tool in addressing working poverty. With over 2500 staff and over 500,000 members, Vancity is using its influential role in the community to advance the Living Wage movement locally and nationally. The Living Wage movement has even attracted unlikely partners. The Living Wage campaign in Hamilton recruited the Chamber of Commerce to become a certified Living Wage employer, and Pathway to Potential in Windsor-Essex partnered with the local Chamber on the launch of the local Living Wage campaign.

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**10 – A Guide for Businesses**  
*Reducing Poverty offers inspiring examples and stories of how business leaders are reducing poverty in communities across Canada.*

Business leaders can also use their platform and profile to challenge, in powerful ways, the prevailing beliefs about poverty. Mark Chamberlain, Hamilton entrepreneur and former chair of the Hamilton Poverty Reduction Roundtable, states: “A solution to poverty...is dependent on a fundamental shift in how we view it and the urgency we place on solving it. First, we need to change the conversation about poverty from ‘charity’ to ‘health,’ and from ‘social cost’ to ‘investment in human development’.”<sup>31</sup> As the new era of business engagement in poverty reduction efforts illustrates, building healthy, inclusive and prosperous communities is a shared responsibility. Businesses, like the community at large, will benefit when all people have enough social and economic resources to live with health and dignity.

## Aligning Poverty Reduction and Reconciliation

Increasingly, VC – CRP cities are developing strategies aimed at addressing the effects of colonialism, which include disproportionate levels of poverty and unemployment, and lower educational attainment rates among Indigenous populations in Canada. With the release of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in 2015, which includes 94 Calls to Action, several cities are aligning their local poverty reduction efforts with TRC recommendations.

The Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council (WPRC), which aspires to be “a City where everyone belongs,” has been guided and inspired by the TRC’s Call to Action #92 that focused on the corporate sector’s role in providing Indigenous peoples with access to training and employment opportunities. After consulting with community members and organizations on Indigenous youth employment issues, the WPRC developed *TRC92: Youth Employment*. The initiative supports private sector companies to learn about Indigenous history and its role in barriers to employment for Indigenous youth, provides anti-racism and inter-cultural safety training with the workplace, and makes critical links between Indigenous youth, organizations that offer community-based training, and local employers.



Dave Angus, President of Johnston Group and former CEO of the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, leads an Employer Consortium that includes twelve corporate sector employers and ten organizations that provide community-based training.

For some cities, there has been a strong push to place equity and social justice for Indigenous peoples at the forefront of their work. *Honour the Treaty Spirit*, for example, is a defining feature of End Poverty Edmonton's (EPE) strategy, and *Eliminate Racism* is one of the strategy's six key priority areas. For EPE, "eliminating poverty is a profound act of Reconciliation for Edmonton's Indigenous community, which is disproportionately impacted by poverty."<sup>32</sup>



Accordingly, the first five priorities of EPE's strategy fall under the theme *Toward True Reconciliation*, and several concrete initiatives that align with the TRC Calls to Action are underway. Additionally, EPE's leadership structure includes an Indigenous Circle that is bringing the spirit and wisdom of Indigenous peoples into the stewardship of the EPE implementation. In a similar vein, the Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership's (SPRP) vision for community leadership states, "We are all Treaty People"; as the SPRP renews its poverty reduction work, it is intentional about creating ethical space to question how the community's shared history informs policy and practice.

Efforts to address Canada's legacy of colonialism, racism and exclusion are occurring within all levels of government. In its *Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy – What We Heard About Poverty So Far* report, the Government of Canada identifies numerous issues affecting Indigenous peoples, including: inadequate funding, housing and homelessness, food security, education, employment and training, the justice system, natural resources, child welfare, and the cost of living. The recent engagement process informing British Columbia's upcoming poverty reduction strategy involved 22 consultations hosted by 19 Friendship Centres. Other examples include Ontario Local Poverty Reduction Fund, which includes an Indigenous Stream, and its strategy that focuses on closing the educational gap and supporting Indigenous entrepreneurship. At the local level, the City of Hamilton's recently announced \$50 million poverty reduction strategy includes \$10 million to address Indigenous housing and poverty issues.

In the years ahead, it is likely that a growing number of cities within the VC – CRP network will adapt and develop approaches for aligning poverty reduction strategies with TRC recommendations.

## Driving Policy and Systems Change through Local Innovations

### Introduction

Within the VC – CRP movement, policy and systems change have always been important indicators of community change. Policy change refers to formal changes in policy and procedure at the governmental and organizational levels. Systems change refers to changes aimed at improving flexibility, integration, and responsiveness within service and support systems. Given that multiple factors contribute to policy and systems change, it can sometimes be difficult to directly attribute the activities within the VC – CRP network to the change that occurs. As the examples below illustrate, however, VC – CRP members are making key policy and system changes in the areas of Living Wage, financial empowerment, housing, and transportation.



## Living Wage

The VC – CRP network is at the forefront of Canada’s growing Living Wage movement, which is a collective effort to ensure that individuals and families earn a wage that allows them to meet their basic needs and fully participate in society.

In 2011, the City of New Westminster, British Columbia became the first Canadian city to implement a municipal Living Wage policy. Several municipalities have since followed New Westminster’s lead, including Pitt Meadows, Parksville, Port Coquitlam, Quesnel, and Vancouver in BC, and Cambridge in Ontario. Two First Nations governments, the Huu-ay-aht First Nation and Yuułu?it?ath Government, have also adopted Living Wage policies. It is likely that the number of local governments introducing Living Wage policies will continue to grow, considering the success so many Canadian cities are having to recruit employers to voluntarily implement a Living Wage.

Within the Canadian Living Wage movement, most campaigns are structured around encouraging employers to voluntarily adopt a Living Wage and publicly certifying and recognizing those who do. For the VC – CRP network, such employer recognition programs are especially powerful, as they provide businesses with a concrete example of how they can immediately have an impact on local poverty. Currently, over half of all VC – CRP members are advancing local Living Wage initiatives; through their collective efforts over 200 Living Wage employers have been recruited. The influential voices of Living Wage employers have helped to shine a spotlight on all the ways that businesses stand to gain from paying a Living Wage (e.g., happier, healthier, more productive employees; positive brand association; lower turnover). Indeed, when understood as a smart business decision as well as the right thing to do, we can understand why the Living Wage is garnering support from some Chambers of Commerce.<sup>33</sup>

The VC – CRP movement’s multisector, comprehensive approach translates well into leadership on local Living Wage campaigns. Calculating a Living Wage, after all, often involves difficult, sector-spanning conversations that go to the heart of the community’s values and aspirations. These conversations inevitably touch on several intersecting dimensions of poverty, including income, employment, health, transportation and child care.

As one of the partners and facilitators for Living Wage Canada, the VC – CRP movement is playing a key role in addressing working poverty in Canada. The Living Wage Canada portal facilitates learning and information sharing among the communities advancing a Living Wage. This includes information on the Canadian Living Wage Framework, which allows for consistency across communities in defining, calculating and developing an employer recognition strategy for the Living Wage.



Though difficult to measure with precision, it is likely that the Living Wage movement in Canada has been influential in efforts to increase the provincial and territorial minimum wages. While the tactics involved in these efforts might differ, the underlying narratives are often interwoven and complementary. When fully implemented, the combined minimum wage increases to \$15 in Alberta, Ontario and British Columbia will result in projected wage increases to nearly 875,000 people: the single largest governmental transfer of wealth in a generation.<sup>34</sup>

## Financial Empowerment

As the financial empowerment movement has evolved, many within the VC – CRP network have found success developing and adopting a range of initiatives aimed at increasing the economic wellbeing of individuals and families.

Several VC – CRP members have recognized the Canada Learning Bond (CLB) as a vehicle through which to mobilize the community to effect measurable change in the area of financial empowerment. Launched by the Government of Canada in 2004, national uptake of the CLB – which provides up to \$2000 to eligible families to put toward savings for their children’s post-secondary education – has remained relatively low, despite the evidence that children with even modest savings are more likely to graduate from high school, pursue further education, and graduate from a post-secondary institution.

In response to this challenge and opportunity, the Halton Poverty Roundtable has been working since 2013 to increase awareness and take-up rates for the CLB. Its Smart Start Halton working group, which has broad, multisector community representation, has developed a community-wide strategy that is yielding results. Between 2013 and 2017, Halton increased the CLB take-up rate from 31% to 38%, representing new education savings for 13,087 children living in lower income families totalling over \$26 million. Smart Start Halton aims to help a further 10,000 eligible children in Halton to register for the Canada Learning Bond by 2019.<sup>35</sup> The multisector, collaborative approach of VC – CRP has lent itself well to the working group’s strategy, which includes coordinating enrollment events, working with organizations to tweak systems to include information on the CLB, and mobilizing people with lived and living experience to learn about and enroll in the CLB.

*Calgary’s Financial Empowerment Collaborative, a critical part of the city’s Enough for All poverty reduction strategy, is working to ensure that everyone in the city has the income and assets needed to thrive. The Collaborative, which provides supports in a number of areas – basic needs, safe and affordable financial products, financial coaching, government benefits, and education savings – has set out to improve the net worth of 45,600 Calgarians living on low income by 2023. Already, more than 20,000 Calgarians with low income have experienced improvements in their net worth.*

Accustomed to working collaboratively across sectors, VC – CRP members have a solid foundation from which to build and adapt successful financial empowerment initiatives. The network’s multisector, collaborative approach lends itself well to a wide range of initiatives that promote access to information, programs, and benefits aimed at increasing the economic wellbeing of individuals and families.

## Affordable Housing and Housing First

Recognizing the critical role that housing can play in lifting people out of poverty and contributing to health and wellbeing, many VC – CRP members have prioritized housing and homelessness within their poverty reduction efforts. This often involves playing a role in supporting local ten-year housing and homelessness strategies that integrate Housing First and developing other innovative solutions that promote safe, affordable, accessible housing.

When Medicine Hat, Alberta, a VC – CRP member city, made international headlines in 2015 as the first city to in Canada to successfully end chronic homelessness, the power of place-based strategies was on full display. “They call me the mayor that ended homelessness,” said Medicine Hat Mayor Ted Clugston, “but really I have to be the mayor of the city that ended homelessness.”<sup>36</sup> Through its Housing First strategy, Medicine Hat committed that “no one in our community will have to live in an emergency shelter or sleep rough for more than 10 days before they have access to stable housing and the supports needed to maintain it.”<sup>37</sup> Since 2009, when it was one of the first cities in Canada to commit to using the Housing First approach to end homelessness, Medicine Hat has helped house 1,094 people and 75% of Housing First clients have maintained their housing. Grand Prairie, Alberta, has also experienced success with Housing First, having helped house 1,070 people since 2009. Momentum for Housing First continues to grow as the evidence of its effectiveness mounts.

“They call me the mayor that ended homelessness, but really I have to be the mayor of the city that ended homelessness.”

- Mayor Ted Clugston

Many other cities are developing innovative community-based approaches to help ensure safe, affordable, accessible and suitable housing. Recent examples include: New Westminster’s rent bank, which provides those in crisis with support in paying rent; Sault St. Marie’s Housing Stability Bank, which offers assistance with rent and/or utilities to help ensure that people remain housed; Surrey’s property tax exemptions to social housing providers that offered housing-ready supports, and land and development fee waivers to encourage the building of supportive housing units; and Haldimand-Norfolk’s funding and administration to 11 social housing providers that offer rent-geared-to-income housing that set rents at 30% of an eligible household’s gross monthly income.

The VC – CRP movement has also contributed to important policy developments in recent years, including advocating for the recently released National Housing Strategy, which will include legislation promoting a human rights-based approach to housing, and inclusionary zoning commitments in some provinces.

## Affordable and Accessible Transportation

Members of the VC – CRP network are increasing access to affordable transportation through partnerships, advocacy and innovation. Affordable and accessible transportation is a critical poverty reduction priority, as it has the potential to simultaneously address numerous barriers. Transportation



promotes social inclusion by helping people get to work, access child care, shop for necessities, attend medical appointments and job interviews, and engage in recreation and leisure activities.

Subsidized transit passes are the most common transportation initiative among the VC – CRP network. The City of Calgary’s Fair Entry program allows low-income residents to access multiple programs and services, including discounted transit, through one application. In May 2016, the Alberta Government allocated three-year funding of \$13.5 million to Calgary and \$12.4 million to Edmonton, on an equal cost-sharing basis. In 2017, Calgary’s City Council allocated \$4 million over and above provincial contributions, leading to more significant transit discounts. Under the new sliding scale model, transit passes in Calgary now cost \$5.05, \$35.35 or \$50.50, depending on income, resulting in savings to users of between 50% and 95% off the regular rate of \$101. Edmonton’s subsidized transit pass provides a 63% discount for people with incomes below the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO). Many other cities currently offer similar transit subsidy programs.

The VC – CRP network has a solid track record of developing and advocating for urban and rural transportation solutions aimed at addressing poverty and social exclusion. Work in this area reinforces that pursuing affordable transportation initiatives can be the cornerstone to ensuring access to other vital programs, services, and supports for people experiencing poverty.

*Rural transportation strategies are showing promise in addressing poverty and social isolation. In Westmorland-Albert, New Brunswick, VC – CRP member WA Action helped facilitate the collaboration of three door-to-door driving groups to ensure access for all Westmorland-Albert residents. The resulting Tele-Drive Rural Rides program uses volunteer drivers to offers affordable door-to-door transportation – for a fraction of the cost of a taxi –so that residents can attend essential appointments. Provincially, the Government of New Brunswick in 2017 committed to invest \$500,000 toward a community-led affordable transportation pilot to provide bus transportation between rural Charlotte County and the City of Saint John.*

## Contributing to Policy and Systems Change Across Governments

While the VC – CRP network reflects a wide range of place-based approaches to poverty, there is a broad recognition among members that local action must include efforts to influence government policies. Members, through leadership roundtables or working groups, often seek to remain highly engaged in policy change efforts across all levels of government. In the 2002-2012 phase of VC, nearly 40% of the total asset benefits produced through Trail Builder activities could be traced to policy change efforts.<sup>38</sup> The emphasis on policy has continued as the network has grown. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a comprehensive analysis of VC – CRP members’ contributions and activities in the area of policy, this section will highlight the policy domains in which a large number of members have been actively engaged.

### Income Security

A common refrain within the VC – CRP network is, “Poverty is not only about income, but it is always about income”. Indeed, recognizing income as a key determinant of health, and the historical inadequacy of social assistance rates, many VC – CRP members are advocating for more robust income

support policies. In many jurisdictions, governments have implemented modest increases to social assistance rates, but there have been consistent calls from many VC – CRP members and other advocacy groups for transformational change. In Ontario, the *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change* report made several recommendations to government that, if fully implemented, would have the potential to significantly reduce poverty, particularly for working-age adults experiencing deep poverty.

While governments have generally been reluctant to significantly increase social assistance rates, some gains have been made in other areas, such as increased asset limits and earnings exemptions. Encouragingly, several provinces and territories are implementing child benefits that are leading to reductions in child poverty, and the federal Canada Child Benefit has helped bring approximately 300,000 children out of poverty, according to the Government of Canada.<sup>39</sup> Through advocacy from VC – CRP members and other groups, there seems to be a growing recognition from many governments of the need to rethink the structure of social assistance systems, which typically use surveillance methods and rules that can impede people from exiting poverty. There is growing government interest, for example, in studying basic income and other policies – such as Pharmacare – that address the intersection of health and income security.

### Child Care and Early Learning

Many VC – CRP members, recognizing the foundational role of child care and early learning in a child's healthy development and future success, have been involved in efforts to increase access to regulated and affordable childcare and advocate for strong early learning policies.



Child care and early learning help children get a good start in life and allow parents to pursue job opportunities and education. The Québec Government, since 1997, has offered a low-fee universal childcare program, which has contributed to a significant increase in women's labour force participation in the province. The Government of New Brunswick provides free child care for low-income families with children aged five and under and an annual gross income below \$37,500, and significant subsidies are available for families with annual incomes above \$37,500. As part of its Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Government of Ontario implemented Full Day Kindergarten for four- and five-year-old children, and Nova Scotia and the Northwest Territories have plans to bring in similar policies.

As the federal *What We Heard About Poverty So Far* report indicated, many Canadians are struggling to find affordable, quality child care, making it difficult to meet their basic needs and pursue job opportunities or further education. Many advocates have long called for a universal child care system in Canada, which has yet to be realized. Dignity for All's *A National Anti-Poverty Plan for Canada* recommended a high-quality, universal, publicly-funded and managed early childhood education and care program. The 2017 federal budget committed to transfer \$700 million per year over 10 years for childcare to the provinces and territories, and the Government of Canada is currently working with the provinces and territories to develop a framework that addresses the need to increase access to affordable, high-quality childcare. With the federal Poverty Reduction Strategy slated to be released later this year, this will be an important area to monitor.

## Post-secondary Education

Within the VC – CRP network, many cities are working to make post-secondary education affordable and accessible for everyone. This involves calling for provincial and territorial poverty reduction strategies to prioritize policies in this area.

Several governments have done so, including the Government of Ontario, which provides free tuition for students whose families earn less than \$50,000 annually; through the Ontario Student Assistance Program, over 200,000 students have received free tuition so far. Similarly, the Government of New Brunswick's Tuition Access Bursary offers free tuition to students from families with household incomes below \$60,000. Other government initiatives to help with post-secondary affordability include the Northwest Territories' enhanced Student Financial Assistance Program, Saskatchewan's Advantage Scholarship, and British Columbia's interest-free provincial student loans and tuition-free Adult Basic Education and English Language Learning programs.

As noted earlier, many VC – CRP members are working to promote the Canada Learning Bond (CLB). With nearly 2 million eligible children currently not accessing the CLB, much remains to be done to help Canadian families with low and modest incomes kick-start the savings process for post-secondary education. The 2017 federal budget reallocated \$12.5 million over six years to launch a pilot project aimed at increasing awareness and access to the CLB. Part of the allocation will support community-based initiatives that propose innovative solutions for increasing CLB uptake. Given the success that some VC – CRP members have already had in this area, we might expect to see some of their ideas and approaches spreading across Canada in the years ahead.

## Predatory Lending

Increasingly, VC – CRP members are raising awareness about and pushing for government action on, predatory lending practices to provide greater protection for those who experience poverty and financial vulnerability.

Several jurisdictions have recently used legislative tools to address predatory lending practices. One example is the Government of Alberta's *Act to End Predatory Lending* legislation, which requires lenders to provide installment plans for all loans and prohibits them from penalizing customers for paying back loans early. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has amended the Consumer Protection and Business Practices Act, which now limits the total borrowing costs for payday loans, requires disclosure statements to be included in loan agreements, and prohibits lenders from rolling owed money into a second loan.

***Since the Alberta Government introduced legislation on predatory lending, the number of licensed payday lenders in the province has dropped from 220 to 165 – a 25% decrease.***

In Ontario, the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (HRPR) has been one of the VC – CRP members leading the fight against predatory lenders, whose high-interest payday loans target those with fixed and limited incomes. As a result of the HRPR's work alongside City Councillor Matthew Green, Hamilton City Council passed a bylaw – the first of its kind in Ontario – to license all 33 payday loan outlets in the city. The motion required lenders to: pay an annual fee of \$750 to cover the cost of an inspection of their operations; provide information on credit counselling to their customers; and display the actual interest rates for all short-term loans.

Earlier this year, the Ontario Government introduced new regulations under the *Payday Loans Act* that include a requirement that lenders show the cost of borrowing a payday loan as an annual percentage rate in advertising or agreements. In addition, under the new provincial law, municipalities were given the power to limit the number of payday loan outlets in their communities. Hamilton became the first municipality to use this authority to zone payday loan outlets – essentially preventing new predatory lenders from establishing outlets in low-income neighbourhoods.

## Conclusion

Cities within the VC – CRP movement are influencing local policies and systems through Living Wage campaigns, financial empowerment initiatives, approaches to affordable housing, and developing solutions to make transportation affordable and accessible. In many cases, clear links can be made between the local poverty reduction strategy's efforts and a policy or system change occurring.

Across the VC – CRP network, it is broadly recognized that local poverty reduction initiatives have an important role to play in influencing (often through advocacy and awareness-raising efforts) policies across all levels of government. While it can be difficult to measure the direct impact of the local effort on a policy change that occurs, it has been suggested that the VC – CRP approach “helps government move on change because proposals are already vetted from multiple interests in the community”.<sup>40</sup> Many recent policy changes in the areas of income security, childcare and early learning, affordable post-secondary education, and predatory lending are helping to lift people out of poverty.

## PART IV – CHALLENGES AND THE OPPORTUNITY

### Challenges

While much of the work detailed in this paper suggests progress on poverty is being made in many areas, there are several challenges facing the VC – CRP network. Many of these challenges mirror those confronting local poverty reduction initiatives – just on a larger scale.

To start with, multisector collaborative work on a complex issue like poverty is difficult, slow-moving, and requires a high tolerance for risk, failure, and uncertainty. Innovation and failure go hand in hand. Building strong, trusting relationships across sectors that have not historically worked together can take a great deal of time, yet communities often feel pressure to act quickly in the face of persistent poverty and a rapidly shifting policy and political landscape.

The VC – CRP network allows for rapid learning and sharing of ideas within and across communities, but there is no guarantee that a program or initiative that shows results in one community will yield similar results in another. While many communities aim to bring about population-level reductions in poverty, establishing measurement frameworks that will isolate the specific impact of the local initiative's efforts can be difficult. Moreover, many cities struggle to gather current, high quality, disaggregated data on local poverty.

Following the remarkable poverty reduction outcomes generated during the 2002-2012 phase, cities across Canada were eager to adapt many of the VC – CRP learnings and innovations to their local context. Thus, there was a compelling case to create a network and provide an open-source platform that would facilitate sharing and learning across cities. While the growth of this network has led to more widespread and varied contributions to poverty reduction in Canada, it has also posed evaluation challenges. With a much larger number of cities involved, and without the same funding and evaluation supports that accompanied the 2002-2012 phase, replicating the more rigorous evaluation approach that was used during the Trail Builders experiment has not been feasible.

Given these evaluation constraints, it has been difficult to demonstrate with precision the network's overall impact on poverty in Canada. In recent years, VC – CRP has introduced different iterations of frameworks in an attempt to support members in framing and evaluating the results and impact of their work. These have had mixed results, in part due to members' varying levels of resources and capacities to measure and disseminate outcomes. The extent of such resources and capacities are often shaped by funding structures and specific requirements of funders, which also vary greatly across the network. Another reality is that VC – CRP members are at different stages of their local work; a spectrum that includes start-up, exploration, implementation, and renewal.

Despite these challenges, it is critically important for VC – CRP to work with cities to develop a framework that supports them in producing and reporting outcomes at scale. This framework will help cities build will and capacity, design effective strategies, and continuously learn and adapt. This is particularly timely in light of the current political window that has opened: the possibility of aligning poverty reduction strategies across all orders of government is imminent.

## The Opportunity

The opportunity for VC – CRP is to engage as many cities as possible in developing a plan to significantly reduce poverty in Canada. Today with 61 regional partners representing more than 176 municipalities, VC – CRP has the potential to contribute to a significant reduction of poverty in Canada.

In 2017, an anonymous donor provided funding to support VC – CRP expanding its efforts in Western Canada: a significant opportunity to increase the movement's impact. Now more than ever, the VC – CRP network is influencing and inspiring action and dialogue across cities and all levels of government. The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, a VC – CRP founding partner and funder, has long been supporting the network's move in this direction. Maytree, also a founding partner and funder, has been instrumental in supporting the VC – CRP network to develop and strengthen partnerships with provincial and federal governments, which are integral to aligning poverty reduction efforts all levels of government.

With such reach and scope, VC – CRP has the potential to facilitate access in a unique way to the voices of the many people experiencing poverty in our cities. Spaces have been created through which the voices of people with lived and living experience can combine with those of business, government, and the social sector to deeply craft place-based solutions. The network hosted 33 consultations in 9 provinces for the development of the Canadian poverty reduction strategy and generated a consistent voice for what needs to occur in cities to end poverty.

In addition to inspiring a national agenda, cities can also inspire local experiments that can be bold and specific about poverty reduction. Member cities like Medicine Hat have tackled homelessness with great success: as the first city to eliminate chronic homelessness, they have brought great hope to cities attempting to do the same. Member cities like New Westminster and Cambridge have worked with city councils to adopt the Living Wage, while many more cities have reached out to their business communities to sign up Living Wage employers. This contributed to the legitimacy and urgency of minimum wage reform by giving voice to those who would benefit from such a commitment. Today three provinces are moving toward a \$15 minimum wage and we predict that within five years a \$15 minimum wage will be in every province and territory in Canada.

A real opportunity exists to align the poverty reduction strategies of cities, provinces and territories, and the federal government: this would be a significant innovation in poverty reduction in Canada. Poverty reduction strategies provide a platform between the levels of government to talk and plan together, and to find synergies across the strategies.

Finally, if we are to significantly reduce – and eventually end – poverty in Canada we will need to deepen Canadians' understanding of how this would concretely benefit all of us. This requires building the will of Canadians to make poverty reduction and eradication a priority in every city, province, territory, and collectively as a nation. Building "will" is an important component of social innovation. If an idea is to reach its potential scale, the majority of people must recognize how it affects their everyday lives. Cities play a role not only in sharing a vision for poverty reduction, but also in bringing the voices of their neighbors to the discussion. In this way, they can show in real time how people are benefiting and demonstrate how poverty reduction improves their lives and their community.



## CONCLUSION

The VC – CRP network, which started as a bold experiment involving 13 cities, now includes 176 cities represented by 61 regional partners. Growing from 13 to 61 members in five short years, the VC – CRP network has made many contributions to poverty reduction in Canada.

Consistent across the network has been a focus on poverty reduction that is grounded in a comprehensive, asset-based, multisector approach in which community leaders rapidly learn and adapt to change. Collectively, these cities have produced myriad local innovations, influenced policies and systems, helped to align and coordinate efforts across sectors, and encouraged all levels of governments to prioritize poverty.

The contributions of the VC – CRP movement have occurred against the backdrop of many other movements and ideas that have shaped the expression of poverty reduction in the new millennium. As the developments in social innovation, financial empowerment, Housing First, national advocacy movements, and government-led poverty reduction strategies illustrate, the relationship between VC – CRP and other movements has been co-creative.

The unique contributions of the VC – CRP network have included multisector leadership roundtables that lead the development of local strategies, and facilitating leadership and action among government, businesses, and those with lived and living experience of poverty. Collective Impact theory and practice are also helping many members realign their work to have an even greater impact. And local poverty reduction strategies are integrating new ways to support Indigenous reconciliation efforts.

Through local innovations, VC – CRP members are changing policies and systems in order to lift people out of poverty. Members are leading and supporting local Living Wage campaigns, financial empowerment initiatives, housing and homelessness strategies, and solutions to affordable, accessible transportation. They are also having influence across key policy areas including income security, childcare and early learning, affordable post-secondary education, and predatory lending.

Currently, the VC – CRP network faces challenges and opportunities. Evaluation challenges within the growing network have made it difficult to present a clear picture of the network's overall impact on reducing poverty; this presents an opportunity to support cities to produce and report poverty reduction outcomes at scale.

As the network continues to grow and evolve, and the number of cities with poverty reduction strategies increases, the case should be even clearer for the vital role that cities play in building an equitable, vibrant, healthy and prosperous country. Against the backdrop of an unprecedented opportunity for alignment across all levels of government, the VC – CRP has tremendous potential to make and demonstrate impact on poverty in the years ahead.

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The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.



## ENDNOTES

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