



REPORT | 2015–2020 CITIES REDUCING POVERTY FIVE-YEAR IMPACT

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Founded in 2002, Cities Reducing Poverty (CRP) has grown to support more than 330 municipalities represented by 80 regional roundtables that develop and implement plans to reduce poverty in their communities. CRP is a powerful collective impact movement that, between 2015 and 2020, contributed to poverty being reduced for more than 1 million Canadians.

INTRODUCTION

Founded in 2002, Cities Reducing Poverty (CRP) has grown to support more than 330 municipalities represented by 80 regional roundtables that develop and implement plans to reduce poverty in their communities. CRP has grown into a powerful collective impact movement that, between 2015 and 2020, contributed to poverty being reduced for more than 1 million Canadians.

The CRP network grew from 45 regional members in 2015 to 80 in 2020. It is supported and funded through a partnership between the Tamarack Institute, McConnell, Maytree, and federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments. The learning community that was formed to deeply understand the work of reducing poverty grew from 1,250 changemakers in 2015 to 6,300 in 2020.

This summary report provides a snapshot of the contribution that CRP has made between 2015 and 2020. It is important to note that Canada saw an unprecedented reduction in poverty over these five years. Prior to COVID-19, our national poverty rate had dropped to the lowest in recorded history. This impact was achieved through a system of exceptional programs and supports of organizations and governments that work at the local, provincial, territorial, and national levels.

This unprecedented reduction has no one cause or *attribution*, but rather is the result of *contributions* made by many. CRP has become a significant contributor to poverty reduction in Canada, and we are grateful for our many partners. Together, we are getting poverty reduction “right” and are establishing a powerful narrative for ending poverty in Canada.

ONE MILLION FEWER PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY

The CRP network of members is engaged in all aspects of poverty reduction – from delivering programs, projects and services, to shifting community awareness and building community will, to realizing large scale systems and policy change. Our members raise collaborative funds, bridge communication

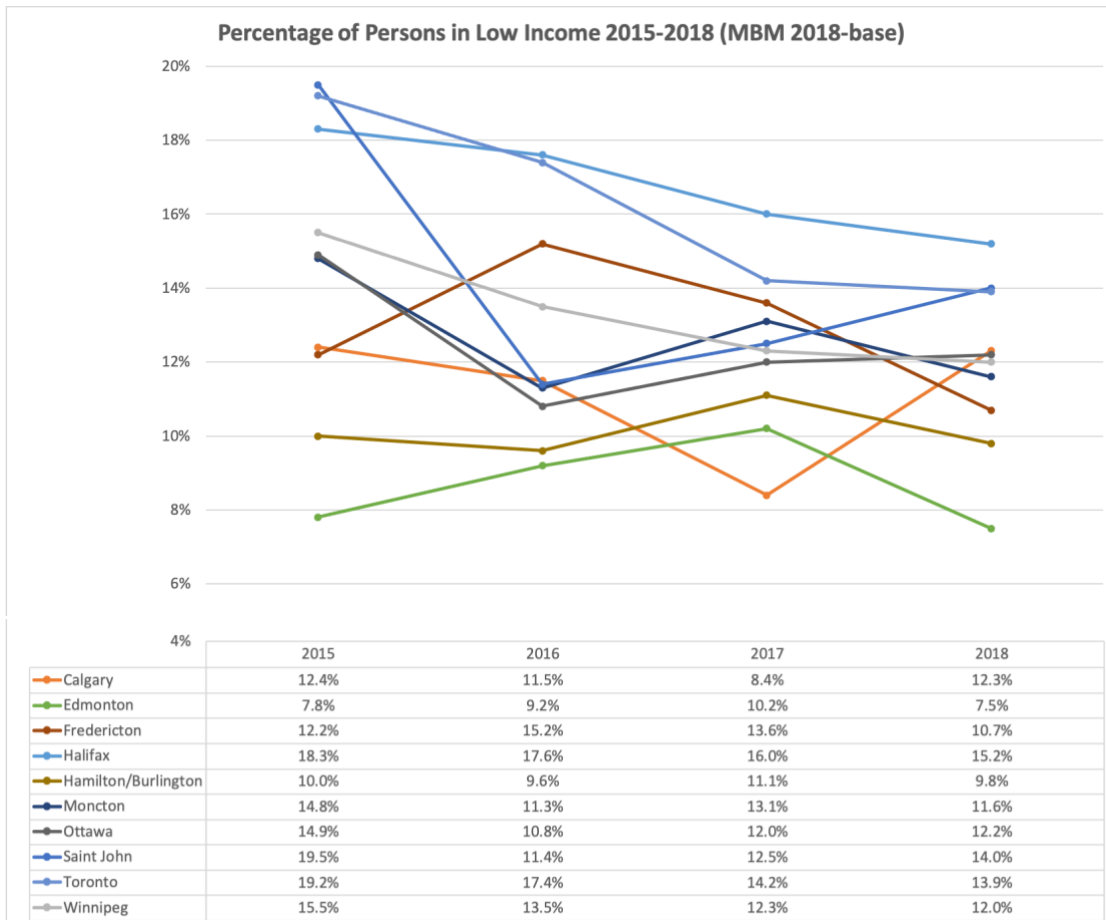
between sectors, and build momentum for ending poverty across Canada and beyond.

CRP’s primary goal since 2010 was to contribute to poverty being reduced for 1 million Canadians. At the time, we considered the goal a “moon shot” strategy meant primarily to inspire. However, this goal was realized in March of 2020 (pre-COVID-19). It



was then that the Government of Canada officially announced that between 2015 and 2018 (the most recent year for which we have comprehensive data), poverty had been reduced to its lowest level in recorded history, and that 1 million fewer Canadians were living in poverty. Of those lifted out of poverty, 334,000 were children and 73,000 were seniors.

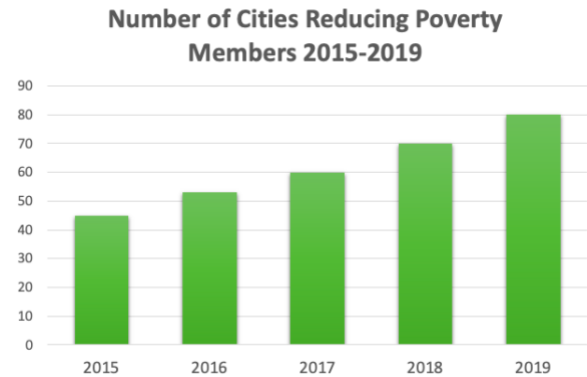
Our regional members are having real success in reducing poverty in their cities and communities. Between 2015 and 2018, poverty rates decreased in 10 of the 14 CRP regions where 2018-base Market Basket Measure (MBM) data is available (see graph below). The most notable reductions were seen in Saint John (from 19.5% to 14.0%), Toronto (from 19.2% to 13.9%), and Winnipeg (from 15.5% to 12.0%). Each of these three CRP members champion poverty reduction both within and beyond their own communities, as they regularly share their experiences, strategies and successes, and provide support to less advanced members of the network. When Saint John joined CRP in 2002, they had nearly 28% of their population living in poverty – one of the highest poverty rates in the country – and their explicit goal was to cut that rate in half. After nearly 20 tireless years, they have achieved their goal.



CRP HAS REALIZED SIGNIFICANT GROWTH

Between 2015 and 2020, CRP has nearly doubled in membership, from 45 members and 1,200 changemakers (individuals that learn from our case studies, research, events, webinars, and publications) in 2015, to 80 members and 6,337 changemakers in 2020. Notably, thanks to key support from a visionary donor, our Western membership has now grown to equal our Eastern membership.

CRP has developed a critical mass, forming what is essentially the largest network of cities working and learning together in the world. Members adopt collective impact approaches to drive long-term change. They ensure that all sectors are brought to the table, harness the assets of their communities, and realize powerful outcomes.



In a 2019 article published in the New York Times, [Winning the War on Poverty](#), acclaimed columnist David Brooks wrote: *“About 15 years ago, a disparate group of Canadians realized that a problem as complex as poverty can be addressed only through a multisector comprehensive innovation... It was going to be addressed through better systems that were mutually supporting and able to enact change on a population level...The [community] plans involve a lot of policy changes [at] the town and provincial levels — improved day care, redesigned transit systems, better work-force development systems. By the time Canada’s national government swung into action, the whole country had a base of knowledge and experience. The people in the field had a wealth of connections and a sense of what needed to be done”.*

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CRP, through the Tamarack Institute, provides customized technical and process support that makes the work of our members easier and more effective. We create connections between members and found a shared knowledge base for communities to build their work out from. CRP webinars, communities of practice, articles, guides, tools, and blogs, inspire members with new ideas and help them to navigate challenges in their own communities. Over the last 5 years, CRP hosted 69 webinars that attracted over 10,000 learners, and hosted national events attended by over 2,000 people in Edmonton, Vancouver, Hamilton, Waterloo and Peel. Members produced 21 case-studies, and completed a Getting to Impact

curriculum that helped them to understand the complex nature of systemic change, and to record this change in their communities.

Over the past five years, we have increased our capacity to provide targeted and focused support to a growing membership. Managers of Cities support up to 30 members each, which includes building personal relationships with city convenors, working with them to understand the needs of communities, and tailoring learning opportunities.

Learning focuses on 4 areas of impact: Progressing through the stages of development (from start up through maturity); developing poverty reduction plans and building community commitment to implement them; implementing poverty reduction plans and tracking and reporting on outcomes; and achieving financial and leadership sustainability.

CRP Four Areas of Impact

1. Progressing through the stages of development
2. Developing poverty reduction plans
3. Tracking and reporting on outcomes
4. Achieving financial and leadership sustainability

The CRP network is learning that to reduce poverty, it takes the whole community and the entire country working together. By supporting planning at local, provincial, territorial and federal levels, we have contributed to a unified commitment and a common language, which is cascading into even more mutually reinforcing activities. As New York Times columnist David Brooks noted in his article, Canada has created a unique approach that is truly working to end poverty.

SUPPORTING PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES

CRP is working with provinces and territories that are making a real difference in reducing poverty. Between 2015 and 2020, eight provinces and territories (SK, NV, PEI, NWT, BC, MB, ON and NB) either developed or renewed their poverty reduction plans. As of 2020, every province and territory has developed a poverty reduction plan or strategy.

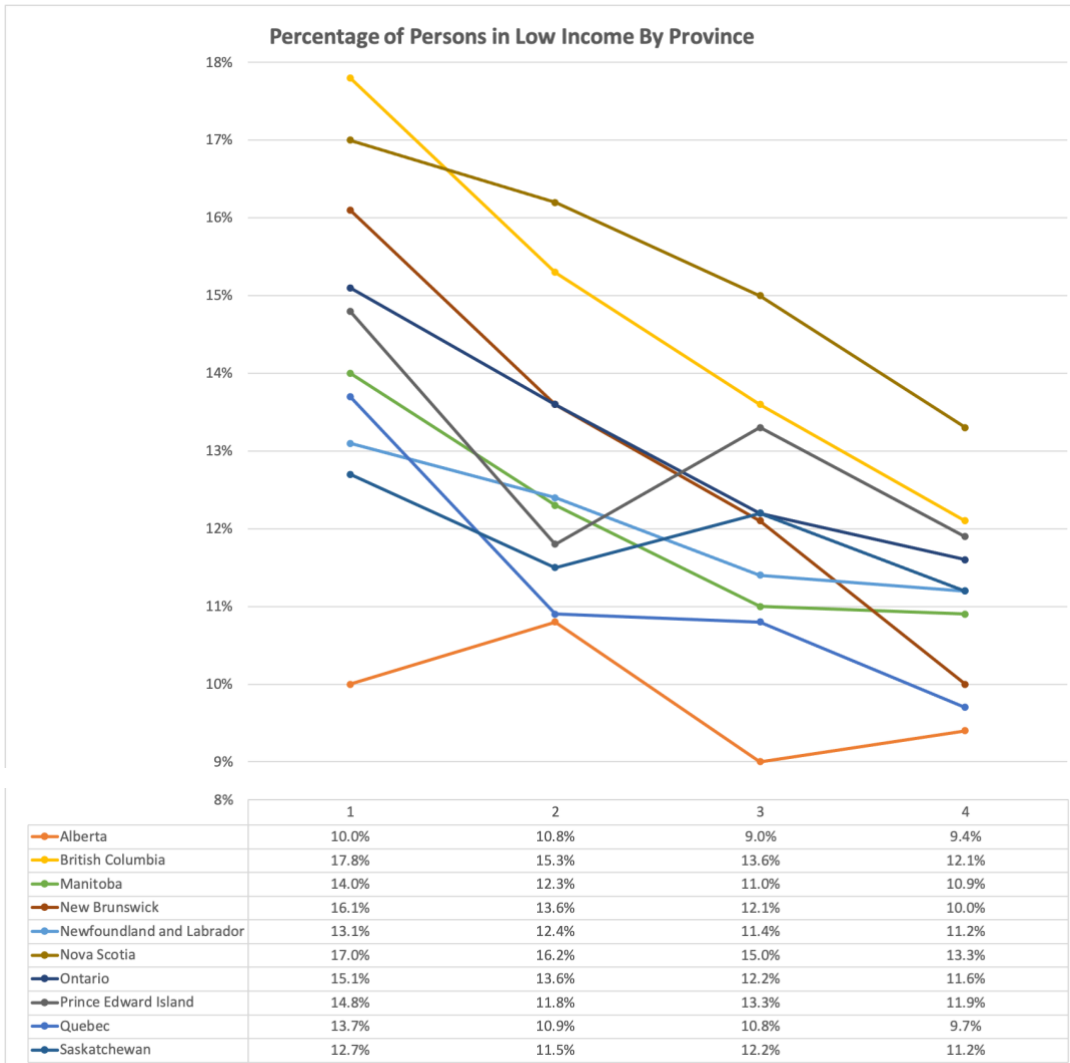
CRP members have been actively engaged in supporting provinces and territories with their strategies. For example, Alberta CRP regional members and their partners published two key papers between 2015 and 2017 that presented a total of 71 recommendations for policy changes that could support poverty reduction. Of these, 22 have to-date been implemented, including the recommendation for a provincial child benefit. In 2019, it was announced that Alberta had cut its child poverty rate in half, and had reduced poverty for more than 55,000 Albertans.

CRP has also worked with the Government of Ontario. From 2016 to 2018, we worked with the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy Office (PRSO) to support Ontario's strategy and to ensure that local and provincial strategies complemented each other. Some highlights of CRP's work in Ontario include: holding a joint symposium, *How Data and Evidence Can Help Inform Poverty Reduction Strategies and Measure Impact*, with members, civil servants and two provincial ministers; conducting a deep dive engagement with the PRSO to develop poverty indicators; hosting a webinar on post-secondary supports with Minister Deb Matthews; consulting with the minister's staff to provide recommendations for the 2020 poverty reduction strategy; and, hosting training to support cities to prepare submissions to the government for their poverty reduction strategy.

Our most recent success comes from British Columbia, where in 2019, the B.C. Government was developing their first poverty reduction strategy. CRP deepened our relationship with key contacts, and invited civil servants and the Minister to participate in our Western Member Gathering to meet with and learn from our members. Following the release of *TogetherBC* in 2019, through conversations with government officials, CRP was asked to provide recommendations to the B.C. Government around funding local poverty reduction work. Soon after, they announced a commitment of \$5 million for local governments to reduce poverty at the local level by developing and implementing strategies. Fourteen CRP members in B.C. were funded through the program’s first round.

By supporting provincial and territorial governments to develop plans, and by supporting strong communications with cities and communities reducing poverty who also have plans, we are able to elevate learning about what works. We turn this into policy and then align actions and target resources to where they will have the greatest impact. The results speak for themselves (see graph below). Using 2018-base MBM, poverty rates decreased in all ten provinces between 2015 and 2018, with the most significant reductions seen in New Brunswick (6.1%), British Columbia (5.7%), and Quebec (4.0%).

The success of these policies has been dependent on strong collaborations between federal and provincial governments, cities, and communities. Cities and communities play a critical role by advocating for supportive policies and programs, supporting families to access tax benefits, and rolling out federal and provincial policies and programs at the local level.



ADVANCING POLICY CHANGES TO REDUCE POVERTY

Between 2015 and 2020, policies enacted by municipal, regional, provincial, territorial, and federal governments contributed to significant reductions in poverty. CRP has actively advanced progressive policy changes with all levels of government. For example, members have met for over a decade to learn about and shape discussions and policies around minimum wage, Living Wage, and Basic Income.

Over the last five years, Nunavut increased its minimum wage to \$16.00 per hour, Alberta to \$15.00, BC to \$14.60, and Ontario to \$14.25. Given that almost half the people living in poverty are working, these changes represent a significant transfer of wealth to the poor. Eight provinces and territories have wage changes coming in 2021, and our members continue to advocate for increases within larger conversations around local affordability, decent work and ending income poverty.

CRP has a decade of experience and has built a strong network of cities learning together to advance Living Wage policies. Having convened Living Wage leaders since 2013, CRP has championed Canada's Living Wage movement through a Community of Practice, support of the development of Living Wage Canada, and social media promotion. CRP has supported members to develop local Living Wage campaigns and deepen conversations within municipalities. Ontario and Alberta's campaigns were supported to become coordinated provincial bodies, and since 2015, Vancouver, Edmonton, Cambridge, Burnaby, Kingston, and North Perth have all become Living Wage employers.

CRP also supports Basic Income conversations across Canada. During COVID-19, we ran five webinars on Basic Income with the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction that discussed the benefits of Basic Income for marginalized groups, how it encourages productivity and education, feasibility in a Canadian context, and its ability to help us weather future crises. This series doubled the registration numbers that we had seen for our 2019 series.

CRP members work closely with mayors, councillors and senior staff to have a city-wide impact on poverty. Over the last 5 years, we have maintained a strong relationship with the Federation for Canadian Municipalities, with Brock Carleton (former CEO) having co-moderated many of our national gatherings and serving as Vice Chair on Tamarack's Board of Directors. We also regularly engage more than 60 municipal leaders in a CRP Municipal Government Representatives Community of Practice that learns together about levers for poverty reduction in a municipal government context. Two considerable wins for the network were Côte-des-Neiges—Notre-Dame-de-Grâce developing a poverty reduction strategy after attending our 2016 summit, and Hamilton's mayor announcing the city's 10-year plan to invest \$50 million in poverty reduction at our 2017 summit. Furthermore, in 2018, 99 municipal leaders attended our two regional gatherings.

SUPPORTING CANADA TO LAUNCH ITS FIRST POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY

Opportunity for All was released on August 21, 2018. It was based on the principle that all Canadians deserve a fair and real chance to succeed and live with dignity, and made a commitment to reducing Canada's poverty rate by 50% by 2030. CRP is committed to and supportive of the goals and



policies of this national strategy. Our regional members work at the local level to implement them effectively. CRP was at the table as a national convener in the development of this strategy. We worked directly with Employment and Social Development Canada to support 27 CRP members to host 33 community consultations in their cities – the most of any organization in Canada – across 9 provinces and territories that reached more than 600 people.

Former Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, released a video offering his thanks to CRP and noted that *“Tamarack (CRP) has been a key part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy...and were instrumental in providing us with grassroots, on the ground, community level feedback.”*

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CRP ACCELERATED LEARNING AND GREW IMPACT

CRP, with the direct support of the Tamarack Institute, has become a top resource in Canada for place-based poverty reduction thinking and action. We have learned and taught about effective approaches to managing large-scale collaborations, and about how to influence high-impact policy and systems change through comprehensive approaches. We understand that poverty is complex, has multiple root causes, and requires collaborative solutions.

Our work has been recognized by many awards, including an Order of Canada. We have been profiled by famous columnists in the New York Times and in featured in the [Philadelphia Citizen as an idea the U.S. should “steal”](#). We are regularly invited to share the CRP story across Canada and around the world

We are particularly proud as a network of our work over the last five years elevating the wisdom and perspectives of people with lived/living experience of poverty. CRP members empower the voices of lived/living experience locally through speaker’s bureaus, citizen voice forums, and lived/living experience advisory groups. Notably, the network formed a special advisory committee of lived/living experience experts that informed the writing of [TEN – A Guide for Engaging People with Lived/Living Experience of Poverty](#). Clearly responsive to our network’s learning needs, the guide was Tamarack’s top publication of 2019, and is approaching 10,000 downloads.

In 2020, CRP published a Getting to Impact report, which shed light on areas of our work where CRP members have had their most significant impact. Eight areas of impact were featured:

1. CRP members raise awareness about end poverty ideas amongst policy makers and the general public around issues such as cost of living, social assistance rates, affordable housing, better wages, and the need for policy changes to address them;
2. CRP members bridge communication between sectors and build relationships and deepen commitment to poverty reduction at the community level;
3. CRP member collaborative partners support innovation while delivering programs, projects

and services to individuals, such as financial empowerment training and eviction interventions;

4. CRP members accelerate Community Volunteer Income Tax Programs in partnership with governments to ensure all people living in poverty are taking advantage of the programs that will support their journey out of poverty;
5. CRP members raise funds and increase place-based funding for poverty reduction through collaborative funding proposals;
6. CRP members run innovation labs and pilot projects to create the case for new policies, such as around affordable housing and transportation;
7. CRP members work with local governments to introduce subsidies that ease the cost of living burden, such as affordable transit passes, affordable childcare, and affordable recreation; and,
8. CRP members innovate to create new infrastructure in their communities, such as increased night bus service, dial-a-ride options, and neighbourhood-based health care.

CRP IS ADVANCING THE END OF POVERTY AGENDA

CRP has always focused on poverty reduction over alleviation, and over the last five years, has evolved our work into an End of Poverty narrative. We advance this narrative through our learning community, particularly through learning events that bring together thought leaders, poverty reduction practitioners, and learners from across Canada to talk and strategize around the difference between alleviating poverty, reducing poverty and ending poverty.

Between 2015 and 2018, we hosted four poverty reduction summits where we co-generated solutions with our network to eliminating poverty. In 2019 and 2020, we convened CRP member gatherings to advance this agenda further. Jim Hughes, formerly with the McConnell Foundation, opened our 2019 gathering with a stirring keynote on the End of Poverty. One of our members noted that this event made her *“realize from those [she] sat with during the previous [CRP summit] plenary sessions and those [she] learned from in each workshop that everyone is already making the idea of The End of Poverty in Canada possible.”* She noted that *“[CRP] has been planting the seeds to grow this idea for many years.”*

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With Canada’s poverty rate dropping over the last 5 years to just over 10%, the end of poverty is in sight. We feel that once we have reduced it to 5%, the End of Poverty narrative will need to change, as those still living in poverty will be primarily those not able to earn a living through traditional work. We

will then need to shift the conversation to improving quality of life through a number of means, including through a Basic Income. The CRP network will actively and openly discuss what it will take to reduce poverty to 5%, and then to end it altogether. This agenda will be the focus of membership over the next 5 years.

CRP is proud of what we have accomplished together over the last 5 years. While 2020's COVID-19 pandemic introduced an unprecedented challenge, the CRP network has responded nimbly with incredible responsiveness and resilience. We are preparing for our next stage of development and for advancing the goal of ending poverty. In May 2021, the CRP network is hosting a virtual *End of Poverty* gathering. We are expecting more than 1,000 people to attend. This will be the time to launch an exciting five-year End of Poverty vision that includes a name change for the network.

Every year, more cities join the CRP network, thereby strengthening our ability to align strategies at the local, provincial/territorial, and federal levels, and amplifying our impact towards our shared goal of ending poverty. We are confident that the solid foundation we have built together for this work, and the learning that we continue to build along the way, will serve as the critical support we need to grow our contribution to ending poverty in Canada.