



Fast

FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES - MANITOBA

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Winnipeg poverty reduction plan needs financial commitment

On November 25th the City of Winnipeg passed its first ever poverty reduction strategy.

The Winnipeg plan was three years in the making, developed through the collaboration of community-based organizations, people with lived experience of poverty, members of City Council and the Public Service. The City agreed to move forward with a plan in response to the release of Make Poverty History Manitoba's Winnipeg Without Poverty report, calling on the City to lead the fight against poverty in our city. That report makes the case that the City of Winnipeg can play a leadership role in the fight to end poverty. It presents fifty recommendations for a comprehensive City-led plan.

Those involved in the community-led initiative are pleased to see that the City has adopted a strategy. But the real test will be its financial commitment. The City will need to put money on the table to show that it is serious about tackling poverty. Its preliminary 2022 budget indicates very little for poverty reduction. But the City still has an opportunity to make amendments and pass a budget that will make a difference.

Here are some key areas we believe the City should begin to invest in now to reduce poverty in the short term.

Investments in public transit.

This is a relatively low-cost commitment that can make a considerable difference

in the lives of low-income people. To start, the city should implement a sliding scale low-income bus pass program fully integrated with the Transit Plus program developed in consultation with community-based organizations.

Housing. The dire state of housing for low-income people in Winnipeg has been well documented. Access to safe and well-maintained low-cost housing is an essential basic need for a host of reasons. It is near impossible to escape poverty if you don't have a roof over your head. Although financing of new social housing is the primary responsibility of other levels of government, the city can do much more. It can start by hiring new staff dedicated to the development of new social housing.

Reconciliation. The City has made a commitment to reconciliation and is commended for supporting a number of initiatives in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's 92 Calls to Action. However, Indigenous people continue to be overrepresented among those living in poverty and true reconciliation will require all levels of government to make this a priority. The TRC reports make clear that poverty, homelessness, addictions, and mental health issues are among the devastating legacies of residential schools. The city must do more to educate employees about the intergenerational trauma resulting from residential school policies.

there is an alternative.

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It should implement ongoing anti-racism and anti-oppression training for all City employees as well as targeted training for first responders including non-violent crisis intervention, de-escalation, mental health first aid, trauma-informed care, and harm reduction.

Jobs. Creating jobs for Indigenous people and others experiencing barriers to employment is an important component of a poverty plan and something the City can do. The City can train and promote existing City staff and it can prioritize Indigenous hires. It can also implement social procurement policies that create opportunities for low-income people facing barriers to employment.

Community-Based Solutions.

Organizations are on the frontlines supporting the most vulnerable in our city. The City must support their efforts by reinstating funding it cut from community organizations in the 2020-2024 budget process. Additionally, the City should redirect a minimum of 10% of current funding for police to community-based organizations that are working on the front lines to address the root causes of crime. The City should also support the expansion of 24-hour safe spaces for the most vulnerable.

Knowledge from the front lines.

People living in poverty and those working on the frontlines have much to offer policy discussions related to poverty. The City should establish a representative community led Task Force to co-create policies to address long standing concerns about police accountability, violence, and systemic discrimination against Indigenous and Black communities.

Recreation. Improving access to sport and recreation is central to a poverty reduction strategy for a number of reasons, including its impacts on health and well-being. The City can eliminate financial barriers to recreation programs. Increasing grants to community organizations delivering free recreation programs in low-income areas by as

little as 10% would make a significant difference.

Over the past 3-years, City staff and community members have worked hard to develop a City-led poverty reduction strategy. This phase is now complete. What happens next is in the hands of our elected officials. How City Council decides to implement the strategy will be the true test of its commitment. Naming a lead department responsible and accountable for implementation, with the authority to direct departmental activities to fulfill the goals of the strategy, will send the message that the City is serious. Most importantly, meeting the goals of poverty reduction, and the priorities listed above, will not be possible without a financial commitment. Adequate financial resources must be allocated to implementing the strategy to demonstrate that the City is no longer willing to defer to other levels of government, but is stepping up to take the lead and do what it can.

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