

Poverty reduction

Living in poverty affects every aspect of life. It limits where people can travel when they cannot afford gas or bus fare, and it can force families into impossible situations, like choosing between paying for housing and paying for food. Reducing poverty produces better outcomes in education, employment, and community safety. The City of Winnipeg has many policy tools to address poverty issues in the areas of safety for all, transit, housing, recreation, and more.

Reducing poverty is also a key dimension of reconciliation — the Truth and Reconciliation Commission considers poverty and homelessness as just some of the devastating legacies of residential schools, and Indigenous people continue to be overrepresented among those living in poverty.¹

Since other AMB chapters such as housing, safety, and Indigenous relations address poverty reduction policy, this poverty reduction chapter will focus on areas including living wage, education, social procurement, and community economic development.

Poverty reduction plan

After many community organizations advocated hard for a comprehensive poverty plan in Winnipeg, the City of Winnipeg responded by putting out its first poverty reduction strategy in 2021.² It was created with the help of frontline community members to tackle poverty at its root causes, but was released with no resources or new budgetary commitments. At the time of the four year budget cycle at the City of Winnipeg, Make Poverty



Manitoba Harvest building / Alanna Yuen

History Manitoba's City Working Group advanced several priorities for the City to include in its budget, in the areas of safety, transit, youth programming, and staff training in anti-oppression. Unfortunately, none of these were funded.³ The AMB will resource the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Plan to make a real dent in poverty in Winnipeg. Expenditures related to transit, recreation, and safety are listed in other chapters.

Living wage

All Winnipeggers should have access to an income that enables them to meet all their basic needs and to participate fully in their community and in the economy. The 2025 Winnipeg living wage, as calculated by CCPA Manitoba, is \$19.77 an hour.⁴ The living wage provides a wage sufficient to afford necessities such as food, shelter, childcare, and transportation, but it does not cover the costs of loans, debt payments, or saving for retirement. While the provincial government is responsible for setting the minimum wage and for setting Employment and Income Assistance rates,

the City can play a role in improving income and employment outcomes for Winnipeggers with its own hiring practices, ensuring a living wage for City of Winnipeg employees and contractors. CUPE Local 500 has negotiated wages for the lowest paid employees that are equivalent to a living wage, which is a step forward. However, all service providers and sub-contractors going forward should pay a living wage. The City of Winnipeg has previously estimated the cost of ensuring all contractors pay at least a living wage to be \$1.6 million.⁵

Buy local

The “elbows up” movement began in Canada in response to the threats of tariffs from the U.S. Local purchasing programs ensure that municipal tax dollars achieve a greater economic impact within a given city or region, recirculating within the local economy to promote employment and spending, rather than leaking out to other jurisdictions. Winnipeggers spoke out about this in spring 2026 when a long-standing local contract for food services at several golf courses was granted to an American corporate food contractor, Aramark, over the iconic local restaurant Salisbury House, which had held the contract for 16 years. The City stated this decision was in part a result of local preference prohibitions within North American free trade agreements.⁶

While there are limits in Canadian trade deals to buying local, they are not determinative. Winnipeg can establish a Buy Local policy and identify suppliers with intrinsic characteristics. For example, the city could give preference to unionized workplaces, co-operatives, or certified sustainable or fair-trade goods and services.

Social procurement

Social procurement describes a policy approach which uses municipal procurement of goods and services as a way to boost economic activity and social inclusion simultaneously. The simplest form of social procurement is to find opportunities to directly purchase from social enterprises who make socio-economic inclusion an essential component of their business model.

The City of Vancouver's Community Benefits Agreement policy, for example, requires that on projects exceeding 45,000 square meters developers must hire at least 10 per cent of new employees from local, equity-denied groups, purchase 10 per cent of goods and services from social or equity-denied enterprises, and purchase 10 per cent of materials, goods and services locally.⁷ Vancouver's Community Benefits Agreement policy was established in 2018, however the policy was made voluntary in December 2025.

Social Procurement in Winnipeg can contribute to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Recommendation #92, supporting equitable access to jobs, training, and educational opportunities for Indigenous peoples, as well as meaningfully fulfilling the goals of the Indigenous Accord. The AMB will commit one staff person to develop social procurement policy at the City of Winnipeg.

Community grants program

The City of Winnipeg provides community grants to support non-profit organizations that make the city a better, safer, and more vibrant place to live. This funding is distributed through the City of Winnipeg Community and Neighbourhood Grant and other targeted programs to directly address four main community goals.⁸ The stated goals include wellbeing, recreation, environmental sustainability, and promoting arts and culture.

Despite the importance of these goals, the City's Community Grants program has been the subject of austerity measures. The City of Winnipeg made a 10 per cent cut to all community grants in 2020, and another proposed cut in 2024 was met with large protests outside of City Hall, which saved the funding from being cut. The community grant funding was restructured, and community groups that previously received annual grants now have to apply for funding each year. The operating grant is evaluated annually, which can be disruptive to longstanding programming that communities rely on. In 2025, in response to the needs of community-based organizations, the City of Winnipeg created a \$3 million three fund for youth programming and outreach. This funded some of the organizations who were cut with the aforementioned changes to the community grants program.

These programs play an important role in poverty reduction through prevention — increasing community safety, wellbeing, making communities more vibrant, and supporting economic stability. Community

groups are hopeful that city staff will engage with them and welcome a conversation about the impact that the programs funded by community grants can have.

It is essential that any changes to the community grants programs are done in meaningful consultation with community-based organizations leadership. This would ensure any changes enhance and support, and do not adversely affect the good work of these groups. The Indigenous Relations chapter explains how important Indigenous-led organizations are to the City of Winnipeg, and commits to funding a multi-year dedicated Indigenous Community Grants Fund for stable operational funding for Indigenous-led organizations.

Actions

- **The AMB will** allocate \$220,000 for 2 FTE staff to develop the next phase of the poverty reduction implementation plan.
- **The AMB will** allocate \$300,000 for training for City of Winnipeg employees on anti-racism and anti-oppression for all city workers, as well as training for first responders around non-violent crisis intervention, de-escalation, mental health first aid, trauma-informed care, and harm reduction.
- **The AMB will** allocate \$1.6 million to implement a living wage for all subcontractors at the City of Winnipeg.
- **The AMB will** allocate \$10,000 for training for relevant staff on how to establish a buy local policy in Winnipeg within trade rules.
- **The AMB will** allocate \$120,000—One FTE to develop social procurement policy at the City of Winnipeg.
- **The AMB will** allocate \$2,516,000—double funding to the existing community grants program to \$5 million per year, and make this multi-year funding.

Notes

- 1 Make Poverty History Manitoba. (2018). "Winnipeg Without Poverty: Calling on the City to Lead." April 2018. <https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Manitoba%20Office/2018/05/Winnipeg%20Without%20Poverty.pdf>
- 2 Make Poverty History Manitoba. (2024). "Winnipeg Without Poverty." <https://www.makepovertyhistorymb.com/current-campaigns/winnipeg-without-poverty-2024/>
- 3 Harney, Niall and Hajer, Jesse. (2025). "Manitoba Living Wage Update 2025." Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba. December 17, 2025. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/news-research/manitoba-living-wage-update-2025/>
- 4 City of Vancouver. "Community Benefit Agreements Policy." <https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/community-benefit-agreements.aspx>
- 5 Pursaga, Joyanne. (2024). "'Living wage' would cost city \$3M annually, report finds" *Winnipeg Free Press*. July 3, 2024. <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/07/03/living-wage-would-cost-city-3m-annually-report-finds>
- 6 Pursaga, Joyanne. (2026). "Buy local advantage would violate trade agreements: mayor." *Winnipeg Free Press*. May 19, 2026. <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/05/19/buy-local-advantage-would-violate-trade-agreements-mayor>
- 7 City of Vancouver. "Community Benefit Agreements Policy." <https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/community-benefit-agreements.aspx>
- 8 City of Winnipeg. "Community & Neighbourhood Grant." <https://www.winnipeg.ca/city-governance/grants-funding-opportunities/community-neighbourhood-grant>