

MAKE POVERTY HISTORY MANITOBA

Make Poverty History Manitoba - City Working Group
Submission to Winnipeg City Council
November 23, 2023

Make Poverty History Manitoba is a coalition of organizations and individuals committed to ending poverty through taking action for public policy change. Our advocacy focuses on the Province of Manitoba and City of Winnipeg. Over 100 organizations throughout the city are part of our coalition.

We are writing about the Poverty Reduction Strategy - Status Update and Implementation Plan 2024-2027 agenda item.

Acknowledging Co-Creation

From 2018 to 2021, our coalition advocated for the City to play its part in addressing poverty and create a strategy, including through our [Winnipeg Without Poverty](#) report which outlined what the city's role in addressing poverty can be and 50 recommendations for the municipality to implement. This was one of the catalysts that led to the City embarking on a process to develop a strategy.

The City passed the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Strategy on November 25, 2021. We have served on the community advisory Core Working Team since that time.

All levels of government have a role to play, and the City is no exception. As the administrative report before you makes clear, the need is urgent. More than 1 in 12 Winnipeg residents live in poverty, including more than 1 in 6 Indigenous people living in Winnipeg.

We are encouraged to see the City of Winnipeg following through on its commitment to introduce this next Implementation Plan for 2024-2027.

We appreciate the work of community-based organizations, people with lived experience who lent their expertise, time, and ideas to, as well as members of Council and the Public Service who have all shaped the implementation plan.

First Implementation Plan

The City's first implementation plan included some significant actions to address the effects of poverty in our community. The Community Connections space at Millenium Library, piloting the Community Safety Host program, moving forward with Social & Sustainable Procurement, and work on Affordable Housing, in particular through an expanded number of positions, were all highlights of the first implementation plan, among others.

However, the conclusion of the Administrative report really hits the nail on the head for our coalition. Many of the actions in the first implementation plan were exploratory and introductory in nature, and major highlights included access to public washrooms and drinking water. **These measures help preserve dignity. But they don't prevent or end poverty.**

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The City can and must take bolder action. The administrative report makes it clear on page 17 when it says “the Poverty Reduction Strategy is heading in the right direction, but that creating actions in the new implementation plan that **focus on creating outputs** that impact those experiencing poverty directly and aim toward reducing poverty in Winnipeg is the next step.”

The Administrative report adds “when resources are provided to assist with the implementation that the pace of progress can improve immensely”. We agree. **We need the City to move faster and more effectively on implementing real systems change. This will require public investment.**

The resource requests included in Appendix 3 represent critical immediate investments that we encourage City Council to adopt and ensure their inclusion in the next four-year budget. We expect these resources are included in the budget as a bare minimum for the City to effectively implement this implementation plan.

Imagine yourselves in 2027, reflecting on this current council term. What do you imagine our legacy as a city is when it comes to reducing poverty in Winnipeg - this humanitarian crisis that impacts 1 in 12 residents in every corner of the City? What actions can you look back on and be able to proudly say that it had a meaningful impact on supporting people to exit poverty?

Priorities

Make Poverty History Manitoba has been participating in the Core Working Team from the start. It’s been a good experience and process. We are grateful that some of the recommendations made by our coalition in dialogue with other community organizations and the Public Service are included in the implementation plan.

However, the major community priorities we have brought forward to prevent and end poverty are not part of the City’s plan.

Over the past two weeks, hundreds of Winnipeggers have been sharing their hopes and vision for addressing poverty in Winnipeg through these priorities, and you may have seen their photo petitions on social media. Thank you to those folks for sharing their voices! We hope you will listen to these voices and amend the plan to better reflect the priorities of Winnipeggers in the following four areas:

Housing

The plan references some measures to support the development and preservation of social housing where rents are geared to income. These are important steps forward but the City has still not set a target for the number of units it would like to add in Winnipeg.

We support the Right to Housing coalition’s recommendation that the City establish a target to add 750 units of social housing annually over ten years owned by public, non-profit, co-op, or Indigenous-led housing providers. We know the City must partner with other levels of government to make this possible. This target is based on research led by the Manitoba Non-Profit Housing Association.

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The Housing Accelerator Fund presents a significant opportunity to reach this target, by bringing federal dollars to Winnipeg that can also be used to leverage provincial funding toward social housing.

The City's proposal sets a target for only 1,342 affordable units over 3 years. We hope the City will amend its proposal to increase this to 2,250 units to reflect the actual need in Winnipeg, and to ensure all units are targeted for the lowest-income Winnipeggers by making them RGI. We cannot miss this opportunity to partner with other levels of government, including supporting energy efficient housing given the increased impact of the climate crisis on those living in poverty.

We also call for the City to hire at least 7 full-time, permanent staff dedicated to the development of new social and affordable rental housing.

The current housing staff of the City have been essential in their role. However, they need more support and 7 full-time staff would bring the city in line with other municipalities across the country. The implementation plan includes no funding for housing staff and relies only on HAF funding which is not guaranteed. We need to make sure these positions are permanent to achieve their purpose.

Transit

Transit is one area the city could have a real impact in the material lives of Winnipeggers living in poverty. The actions in the implementation plan to pilot programs for youth aging out of care and for at-risk Indigenous women and gender-diverse people, increasing transfer times, and WINNpass improvements are important steps.

We are calling for a deeply affordable low-income bus pass of 80% subsidy to the monthly cost. We must make it easier to access. I have seen the process for applying for a pass, I found it complicated.

These programs are great, but we also must acknowledge that means-tested public programs can be administratively burdensome and may not achieve deep impact. We must see bolder action to make transit affordable if we want to prevent and end poverty. Plus there are added climate benefits.

Our coalition is calling for piloting fare-free public transit in Winnipeg to understand the full benefits and challenges, and understand how a universal system would be easier to administer for the city and access for low-income Winnipeggers.

Safety

We support the initiatives in the implementation plan that support harm reduction and alternative community safety models. For too long, we have prioritized policing and surveilling the lives of those living in poverty, particularly unsheltered Winnipeggers.

We are calling for a redirection of 10% in policing funds to go to community-based safety initiatives and organizations that address the root causes of crime, with a priority for Indigenous-led organizations. We support expanded support for 24 hour safe spaces, alternative community safety models like the Community Safety Hosts program, public washrooms, and safe consumption sites.

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Reconciliation and Anti-Oppression

Our fourth priority relates to mandating and providing ongoing anti-racism and anti-oppression training for all City employees as well as targeted training for first responders around non-violent crisis intervention, de-escalation, mental health first aid, trauma-informed care, and harm reduction.

We support the inclusion of funding for training in this implementation plan, but urge the City to mandate this training for all frontline staff including first responders, and work to ensure that training focuses on anti-racism and anti-oppression as a key outcome.

We also call for hiring at least 3 more full-time staff in the City's Indigenous Relations Division to work on poverty reduction, social inclusion, cultural reclamation, and healing. We note that things are moving in the right direction by including funding for one position, but more is needed. Finally, we call for ensuring the City's operating grant process prioritizes funding for Indigenous-led community-based organizations.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion about the Implementation Plan today. We appreciate the City continuing to play its part in addressing poverty through having a strategy.

We call on you today to commit to bolder action beyond what is included in the current implementation plan, starting by including the community priorities we have outlined. These actions will take us from managing poverty, and toward actually ending it.

We support that additional resources are included for this implementation plan, staff are crucial for making sure that action plans are completed, and expect these to be included in the next four-year budget.

We also need to see greater investment in measures and initiatives that will directly reduce poverty.

We implore you to ensure that this conversation, the recommendations within this report, and bolder measures are not cast aside come budget time. They are critical to the health and well-being of our city.

We hope that come 2027, we can reflect on having made a significant difference in addressing poverty in our City and feel proud of accomplishing an ambitious action plan as a municipality.

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