

# Police Services

WINNIPEG'S DECADES-LONG PRACTICE of defaulting to the Winnipeg Police Service (WPS) to address societal failures is a costly failure. In 2020, Winnipeg spent 27 per cent, \$304 million, on policing.<sup>1</sup> That is the highest percentage of Canada's 10 major cities.<sup>2</sup> In that same year, Winnipeg also, once again, topped this list of cities with the highest police-reported violent crime severity index.<sup>3</sup> Of these same cities, the WPS' rate of solving criminal incidences or clearance rate tied for third lowest at 34 per cent.<sup>4</sup>

The public has become increasingly aware and concerned. An Angus Reid poll in late 2020 found that 26 per cent of Winnipeggers had an unfavourable view of the service, the highest of any major prairie city. A full 36 per cent of Winnipeggers supported a reduction in the police budget.<sup>5</sup> In a 2020 Ipsos poll 51 per cent of Canadians supported reallocating police funding to other government services. Saskatchewan and Manitoba said the same at a higher than average rate, 56 per cent.<sup>6</sup>

The WPS continues to press for annual increases well above the rate of inflation and City Council has concurred. The 2022 police budget is \$320 million or 27 per cent of the total city expenditures. Even that sum was \$9 million less than requested by the WPS.<sup>7</sup> The rest of the Protection and Community Services department's budget, excluding fire and paramedic services, is \$172 million. This is what we devote to recreation, parks, urban forestry, community liveability, libraries, arts, entertainment, culture and even insect control, combined.<sup>8</sup>



As we approach the municipal election in October of 2022, we must confront some stark realities. For one, the COVID pandemic has laid bare so many pre-existing inequities. Racialized communities have been hardest hit as they had the least to fall back on given they are over-represented in poverty.<sup>9</sup> Campaign 2000 MB's most recent annual reports further substantiate that poverty continues to be both gendered and racialized which leaves almost 89,000 of Manitoba's children in poverty, 40 per cent of whom reside in Winnipeg Centre and 31 per cent of whom reside in Winnipeg North. Every other federal riding in Winnipeg is home to a certain percentage of struggling families.<sup>10</sup>

For another, the 2020 videoed killing of George Floyd by three Minneapolis police officers became a catalyst that amplified the Black Lives Matter movement around the world. Here in Manitoba, it also served as yet another reminder of how systemic racism has long impacted the policing of Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities. Data compiled by the CBC between 2000–2020 show that racialized community members faced a disproportionate risk of being killed in encounters with police. Indigenous people make up 12 per cent of Winnipeg's population while Black people make up 4 per cent.<sup>11</sup> Of the twenty-two people killed in police encounters

during this period, 70 per cent were Indigenous or Black in Winnipeg.<sup>12</sup> In April of 2020, 3 Indigenous people, Eishia Hudson, Jason Collins, and Stewart Andrews, were killed by police in a span of just 10 days.

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## In Whose Interest?

The WPS, Winnipeg Police Board (WPB) and the Winnipeg Police Association (WPA) along with successive Councils have long defended or dismissed the annual increases to the WPS budget as simply the result of contract negotiations given that salaries and benefits account for 85 per cent of the total WPS budget. This is an abdication of responsibility. They are the bargaining parties. The public interest should be the primary focus when spending public funds.

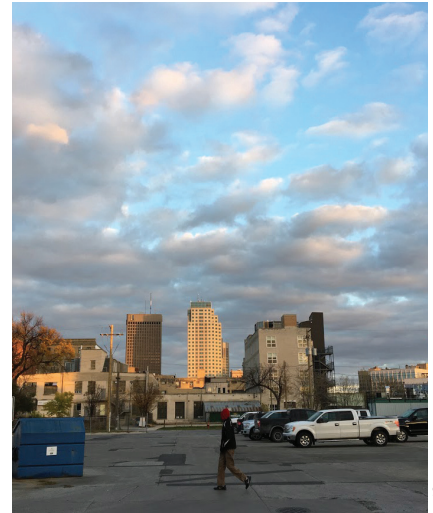
The City of Winnipeg should resource evidenced-based approaches to crime reduction through social development. Criminologists agree that policing is merely reactionary. What is needed is proactive approaches to address criminal behaviour drivers such as poverty and marginalization.<sup>13</sup> While the WPS and the City mention crime reduction through social development in their various strategies, their lack of true commitment to this approach is evidence by their funding demands and decisions.

*The Winnipeg Free Press* found the police received wage increases significantly higher than the rate of inflation between 2012– 2020. The average salary for a police officer in Winnipeg was \$122,227 in 2020.<sup>14</sup> This is a trend across Canada; the average salary of a police officer was \$118,000 in 2019.<sup>15</sup> What is important for the public to understand is that the budget increases are not going to increasing public safety measures but rather salary increases to already well paid members of the service. 2022 is a significant year as it will not just see a municipal election but also a new collective agreement between the City and the WPS. These negotiations and results will continue to impact the City's ability to provide essential municipal services that also promote better public safety such as poverty reduction, recreation, and youth employment for years to come.

No one disputes that the work can be difficult and dangerous at times. However, the WPS is afforded a tremendous amount of latitude in how they go about that work. The civilian oversight bodies, both at the municipal and provincial level, more often than not support the actions taken by individual members of the service by either dismissing complaints outright, agreeing that the use of force was justified or refusing to prosecute even when charges

are recommended. This affords them a position of privilege, a level of personal safety and autonomy that the general public does not have, that can be and has been abused.

A 2021 third-party report on morale, *The Winnipeg Police Service Mental Health and Workplace Culture Survey*, demonstrated negative impacts of policing work on service members. Some 63 per cent of sworn officers and 53 per cent of civilian service employees felt their work was having a significant impact on their mental health, with nearly a third of police officers meeting the diagnostic criteria of PTSD, anxiety and depression. The report also noted that members wanted more done about problematic members more quickly. Additionally, it noted that 41 per cent of civilian members and 32 per cent of officers reported having been the victim of workplace harassment or bullying in the previous three years. Reporting of these incidents was low but of those reported, the most commonly identified aggressor was a co-worker or direct supervisor.<sup>16</sup> It would therefore seem that even WPS members, civilian and sworn officers, would also benefit from change.



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## Safety for All or Just Security for Some?

WPS Chief Danny Smyth has stated that if calls for service and/or WPS responsibilities were cut, he would be open to some discussion, at least, on budget reductions.<sup>17</sup> However, we have to resist seemingly progressive moves by the WPS that purport to be more community-based but in fact further solidify WPS involvement and control. How police respond to people with mental health challenges is one example.

In 2020, the WPS responded to 18,991 wellbeing checks, making them the top resident generated dispatch event for the first time ever. Wellbeing checks by police have resulted in escalation and criminalization of people struggling with mental health issues.<sup>18</sup> Then there are the tragic outcomes of police involvement with people in mental health crisis internationally, nationally and here, with the most recent case of Machuar Madut, ending in his death in 2019. A better response is essential.

In 2021, the WPS, WPB and Shared Health announced the Alternative Response to Citizens in Crisis (ARCC) program. ARCC does not reduce police involvement but rather doubles it. ARCC teams consist of plain clothed officers and specialized mental health clinicians. The initial call will still go

through the standard 911 police response and regular responding officers will largely be assessing whether the ARCC team should be brought in or not.

Chief Smyth reinforced the view that a police presence was necessary, saying “it is only after our officers respond and confirm a situation is safe, that alternative support can engage and address the psychological and social needs of persons in mental health crisis.”<sup>19</sup> Such a view suggests that there is a hierarchy in personal safety. No one wants anyone putting their lives at undue risk, but as noted in a 2014 report into use of force by the Toronto Police service, “culture eats training.”<sup>20</sup> Even with mental health training, police officers see a person in crisis as a threat to themselves and others first. This leads to a security first for some rather than a safety for all approach. These encounters can be traumatizing even when they end peacefully. At worst, a police presence can and has escalated these situations. There are alternatives.

One promising alternative is the Crisis Assistance Helping Out on the Streets (CAHOOTS) model from Eugene, Oregon started 1989. The program involves teams of specially trained civilians, including nurses, crisis counsellor and peer workers, who will respond to a wide range of mental health-related crisis, including “conflict resolution, welfare checks, substance abuse, suicide threats, and more, relying on trauma-informed de-escalation and harm reduction techniques.”<sup>21</sup> CAHOOTS has an annual budget of just \$2.1 million. While Eugene is a smaller city than Winnipeg, CAHOOTS is being replicated in larger centres such as New York. Toronto is rolling out its Community Crisis Support Service (CCSS) pilot program.<sup>22</sup> CCSS principles and practices are in line with CAHOOTS.

What these programs do differently is that the community/civilian response is first and then they decide if police are needed. The CAHOOTS experience is that out of 24,000 crisis calls, they only needed to call on police 150 times. This means that 99.4 per cent of the time, they managed a crisis without the police. The CAHOOTS program is estimated to save the city of Eugene \$8.5 million each year that would otherwise have gone to their police budget.<sup>23</sup>

Winnipeg has community outreach organizations that have strong relationships with community members. They are often already known and trusted by people, such as those experiencing homelessness, whose other struggles keep them from full recovery. Winnipeg could develop specialized, 24/7 crisis intervention teams to respond to all mental health crisis calls. An essential aspect of the CAHOOTS approach is that the person in crisis sees themselves reflected in those offering supports not someone in a uniform and/or armed. Too many people with mental health issues have already had

negative experiences with police and other system authorities. Subduing someone, either through intimidation or outright physically, is not the same as a de-escalation approach. While the former may seem faster and therefore better, it simply continues and exacerbates the trauma cycle. The CAHOOTS model is one that ‘de-tasks’ the more common police first approach.<sup>24</sup>

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## **We Are All at Fault for the Default**

The WPS is not responsible for all the other systemic failures that lead people into crisis and/or criminal behaviour. However, they are responsible for the decisions they make that perpetuate harm. Every increase in their budget means a decrease somewhere else given that the City must, by law, present a balanced annual budget. Successive Councils have continued to capitulate to unsuccessful approaches to create a better and safer community for all by over-investing in policing. And the electorate has, in the past, agreed. However, as the polls above and others indicate, that is changing.

The Police Accountability Coalition (PAC), comprised of over 100 community-based organizations, calls for a 10 per cent redistribution of the WPS budget to community building and community-based crisis response initiatives.<sup>25</sup> In 2022, that would mean \$32 million would flow back into community driven and evidenced based strategies proven to enhance community wellness and safety.

This call is also made in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement’s demand that the systemic racism within policing be addressed. The WPS, with the WPA, must hold those members who abuse their position of privilege and authority accountable. They need to ‘police’ their own. Not through opaque internal investigations but by fully and freely participating in third-party investigations that:

- Ensures whistleblower protections are effective and enforced,
- Holds their members accountable for harm done, and
- Commits to repairing that harm with meaningful action through systemic practice and policy change when necessary.

A 2019 Statistics Canada estimates that 50 per cent to 80 per cent of calls for service from police across the country are not for criminal matters.<sup>26</sup> This must stop. However, the WPS must be willing to engage meaningfully with the community on realistic timelines with measurable outcomes. Community partnerships must be equal partnerships where community expertise

is demonstrably respected by the WPS through actionable change. While there is always inherent risk in change, we, the collective we, must decide that the risks of maintaining the unsustainable and largely ineffective status quo is unacceptable.

Immediate recommendations on how to spend re-allocated police resources:

1. Revise the current ARCC program to align with CAHOOTS so that it is a community/civilian first based response.
2. Fund the City of Winnipeg's Poverty Reduction Strategy with resources going to strategy-dedicated staffing and its two Life Poles of Affordable Housing and Indigenous Children, Youth and Families with an annual dedicated budget line (see Housing, Indigenous Relations and Recreation chapters).
3. Fund the Newcomer Inclusion Strategy through dedicated strategy staffing to enact the strategy's goals with an annual dedicated budget line (see Newcomer Inclusion chapter).
4. Support existing and expansion of 24/7 safe spaces and outreach initiatives that ensure cultural and neighbourhood needs are met.
5. Support the recommendations within this Alternative Budget that adhere to all TRC Calls to Action as well as MMIWG Calls for Justice including PAC's call for more accountability in policing and reforms to legal institutions such as Manitoba Justice.

#### **New Revenue:**

- 10 per cent cut to Policing Services = \$32 million

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## **Endnotes**

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