



Fast

FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES - MANITOBA

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City no longer a player in poverty reduction: Winnipeg falls further behind other cities with proposed budget cuts

The City of Winnipeg's preliminary operating budget for 2013 cuts spending on poverty reduction, housing, and neighbourhood initiatives at a time when government leadership and resources are desperately needed to address economic and social inequality.

The document indicates that the City will further reduce an already limited role when it comes to partnering with others to reduce poverty in Winnipeg. This step backwards will move Winnipeg in the opposite direction of other major cities like Ottawa, Calgary, and Edmonton, who are all increasing their engagement in poverty reduction efforts.

The consequences of withdrawing from poverty reduction efforts will negatively impact not only our most vulnerable citizens who live in poverty, but will affect all citizens because of the strain poverty puts on our economic and social systems. For example, the city police budget has gone up 65.5% since 2005 and will see an increase of 10.1% in 2013.

Governments and poverty reduction advocates across the country have emphasized the need for all levels of government to play a role in reducing poverty alongside the non-profit sector and the private sector. People living in Winnipeg's most impoverished neighbourhoods have been working together through community-based

organizations to deliver innovative community-owned initiatives that effectively reduce poverty and improve social wellbeing. They need all levels of government to play their part and contribute to their efforts in making poverty reduction a reality in their community.

In 2009, the Province of Manitoba introduced All Aboard: Manitoba's Poverty Reduction Strategy. Although it has not met all the requirements of a comprehensive plan, it has been a step in the right direction and has led to some important initiatives.

The City of Winnipeg continues to invest in recreation and Aboriginal youth employment development through the Aboriginal Youth Strategy. Investing \$7 million, initially allocated to a waterpark, into parks and recreation is also a good move.

But, poverty reduction advocates in Winnipeg have long been urging the City to integrate these initiatives into a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy which would be developed in consultation with the community. Ideally, this strategy would complement the Provincial strategy, outlining actions that fall specifically within the City's mandate. Governments across Canada are now leading the development of comprehensive poverty

there is an alternative.

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reduction initiatives in collaboration with communities because they know that narrowly focused solutions don't work.

Rather than leading in the development of a poverty reduction strategy, Winnipeg has taken a minimal role, contributing to poverty reduction largely by funding and partnering with other organizations. But actions in the 2013 operational budget suggest the City is backing off on this very limited commitment.

The preliminary operational budget for 2013 includes 10% cuts for a number of community based organizations that provide cultural, historical and recreational resources, which directly affect the quality of life in Winnipeg. These and other city funded programs can all contribute to poverty reduction efforts. Furthermore, the document eliminates all funding that the City had previously allocated toward a partnership with other sectors of society to develop a comprehensive plan to end homelessness.

Poverty and social exclusion remain a persistent and growing problem in Winnipeg, particularly in our inner-city neighbourhoods. The correlation between poverty and social exclusion on the one hand, and lower educational levels, poorer health outcomes, and higher levels of crime on the other hand, has been well documented and continues to be displayed in Winnipeg.

The impact is also being felt outside of the inner-city, and increasingly Winnipeggers are expressing concern about the levels of poverty and want to do something about it. The City's budget document shows that public concern about dealing with poverty is growing. This is because we know the associated costs of poverty affect us all and are much higher than the cost of the investments required to address poverty and social exclusion.

Municipal governments in other jurisdictions have realized that the "right thing to do" is also prudent from an

economic standpoint, and many have begun to act. The City of Ottawa, and the Community Foundation of Ottawa, partnered with the community to release an Ottawa Poverty Reduction Strategy in 2010 as well as a Housing and Homelessness Investment Plan. The City of Calgary is currently partnering with the United Way to develop a long-term community-based strategy to significantly reduce poverty. The development of the strategy will be modeled on the City's existing Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness. In October 2012, the City of Edmonton committed to working in partnership with stakeholders to develop an Edmonton Poverty Reduction Strategy.

While other municipal governments are taking significant and positive steps forward to address poverty, homelessness, and social exclusion, the City of Winnipeg is proposing to move backwards with Budget 2013.

The City of Winnipeg's official development plan, OurWinnipeg, commits the City to work within its service areas as a collaborator on poverty reduction, yet it appears to be walking away from that commitment. There is still time for City Council to reverse the cuts that undermine our quality of life and exacerbate the inequities that affect everyone. Ignoring these inequities now will only lead to bigger problems in the future.

Kirsten Bernas sits on the Executive Committee for Make Poverty History Manitoba.

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