

# ACORN CANADA

UNITING COMMUNITIES FOR JUSTICE



# 2018







We believe that social and economic justice can best be achieved with a national active membership who are invested in their organization and focused on building power for change



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**In 2018, ACORN Canada engaged 628 new full members, and 14,000 new members in total.**



**Nationally, we held 381 events, turning out 5,691 people – an average of over seven events every week.**

**Events included leadership workshops, chapter meetings, public forums and actions.**



**Members fought for healthy homes and landlord licensing, fair wages, affordable transit, fair banking, and more.**



With National staff branching out to a new office, we were able to begin creating a field organizer training centre in the Toronto ACORN office, to facilitate staffing for remote offices in Metro Vancouver and Halifax, among others. Plans also continue for the expansion of field staff in Peel Region and the wider GTA, and planting seeds for future organizing in other areas including Calgary, Winnipeg, and Regina. Our Gatineau chapter in Quebec also experienced rebuilding efforts this year, including sustained door-knocking and chapter meetings around some of our key campaign issues.



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# WHAT IS ACORN?



ACORN Canada (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) is an independent national organization of low- and moderate-income families. We have over 130,000 members organized into twenty-four neighbourhood chapters in nine cities across Canada.

We have local chapters in the following locations:

- New Westminster
- Burnaby
- Surrey
- Coquitlam
- Ottawa
- Toronto
- Hamilton
- Brampton
- Mississauga
- Gatineau
- Montreal
- Halifax
- Dartmouth



# CAMPAIGNS

## Fair Banking

After a 3 year municipal campaign, Ottawa ACORN members were able to convince City Council to unanimously support directing staff to investigate the possibility of licensing, distancing and capping payday lenders. City planners expect the new bylaw to be approved by Council in the Fall of 2019.

## Healthy Homes

Tenant rights and healthy homes continues to be one of our biggest issues across our ACORN offices, both on local and regional levels.

In Ontario, following province-wide actions on Inclusionary Zoning at the Ministry of Housing in the beginning of 2018, ACORN won new regulations around IZ in April. Municipally Ottawa ACORN members successfully made IZ an election issue, with 95% of candidates supporting the policy.

In late August, a devastating fire in Toronto's St. Jamestown neighbourhood displaced 1,500 tenants. By the end of November ACORN had held eight actions with displaced community members demanding improved housing and communication from the landlords. Through these actions we were able to secure hotels and apartments as temporary housing for many tenants, along with weekly stipends for food. Through this campaign we have also

been able to strengthen our St. Jamestown chapter and develop exciting new leadership in the neighbourhood.

In Ottawa, city hall set aside \$300,000 to review "regulating rental accommodations". ACORN members fought to include landlord licensing in this review, with creative actions including delivering "broken heart" Valentines to councillors who did not support the campaign, and hanging up a clothesline of housing complaints outside City Hall.

In Hamilton, housing continues to be our membership's number one issue, specifically rising rents and unlivable housing conditions, leading to the creation of a city-wide campaign to fight for overhauling the city's apartment standards, create landlord registration system of ALL rentals, with no displacement and no renovations.



In BC, our long-time campaign to save the Metrotown apartments had its most successful year yet. ACORN members were involved in several actions at rezoning hearings at Burnaby City Hall, building strong public opposition to Mayor Corrigan's plans. ACORN's political action committee was able to convince mayoral candidate Mike Hurley to get behind the anti-demoviction campaign and commit to stopping them if elected. Mike Hurley won the election and ACORN ally Joe Keithley was elected to council. Moving forward ACORN members will work with the Affordable Housing Taskforce to preserve existing housing in Burnaby.

Peel ACORN pushed forward with its Affordable City Platform, focusing on affordable housing. Leaders held a rally just prior to the 2018 municipal election, which garnered attention and had allies from the Peel labour movement involved. Leaders also managed to get 3 of the 8 elected councillors to sign on to ACORN Affordable City Pledge which called on the city to implement mandatory inclusionary zoning and fund social housing repairs.

Nova Scotia ACORN Leaders held a successful Housing Forum in the early summer that was widely attended by city council and community allies. ACORN members also held events calling on the provincial government to fund social housing repairs, give inclusionary zoning powers to the municipalities, and bring in real rent control.

## Social Assistance & Disability Rights

ACORN members in Ontario were mobilized by new cuts to social assistance by the newly-elected Ford government this year. In Ottawa, an emergency action on cuts to ODSP/OW turned out over 100 members in just 4 days in August; other actions have continued across the province targeting Minister Lisa MacLeod's attack on benefits.







## Childcare

The \$10 and Change campaign for affordable childcare was launched in Ontario in late 2017, and Toronto ACORN won city council support for the program as well as a meeting between ACORN leaders and the Minister of Early Years and Childhood Development. In 2018, in coalition thanks to provincial funding we won 825 new childcare spaces in Toronto.

In Ottawa, a city-wide leaders meeting on childcare created municipal demands for the campaign, including prioritizing funding for affordable daycare spaces in lower income neighbourhoods; Community Benefits Agreements that involve the creation of affordable child care spaces; easier access to information on subsidy programs; and expanded programming for parents who work non-standard hours.

ACORN members in Ontario continue to fight for \$10/day childcare, modeled off of the system in Quebec.

## Internet for All

In June, ACORN leaders met with Minister of Innovation, Navdeep Bains, who declared access to internet a right. Thanks in part to the hard work of ACORN members on this important campaign, the federal government introduced the Connecting Families program, which will grant access to \$10/month internet to over 200,000

households.

Most Nova Scotians did not benefit from ACORN's national victory though, because Eastlink – the privately held telecom giant in Atlantic Canada - decided to be the only telecom to not opt into the voluntary program.

Nova Scotia ACORN members fought back against Eastlink's decision, winning a meeting with the President of Eastlink. At that meeting ACORN leaders were told that Eastlink could not opt into the program because they are too small and are already doing so much to get internet into rural areas. ACORN members plan to continue calling out the hypocrisy of Eastlink's millionaire owners and fight to close the digital divide.





# FREE INCOME TAX & BENEFIT CENTRES

ACORN Canada's Income Tax Sites and Benefits Clinics continue to successfully boost financial literacy in low income communities, drawing thousands of people into ACORN offices in Ontario and British Columbia each year.

In addition to tax preparation, the program connects low and moderate income families with unrealized benefits. This year we continued to connect families to the Ontario Electricity Support Program through our Ottawa office's tax and benefits centre, saving them \$45-\$75 off their hydro and electricity bills each month. Through the Ottawa office we were able to do outreach to over 400 eligible recipients of the Equipass program, a discounted transit fare benefit. We also registered 450 children from low income families across the country for the Canada Learning Bond, ensuring up to \$2,000 per child was deposited in an RESP for their post-secondary education.

In 2018, ACORN offices filed 811 tax returns in our Ottawa site, and 1,036 tax returns in our Metro Vancouver site. Since 2007, our tax sites have filed over 39,000 tax returns across the country, returning over \$50 million back into our neighbourhoods!



# ACORN LEADERS IN THE PRESS

ACORN Canada was in the press over 200 times in 2018 – here are some highlights:

## **Toronto ACORN**

Bloomberg: Population Boom Is Turning Toronto Rental Market Into Nightmare

Global News: Displaced residents of 650 Parliament St. protest lack of landlord help 10 days after fire

Toronto Star: Change in Toronto is coming from the bottom up

CBC News: ACORN holds anti-gentrification rally in Weston

Toronto Star: Toronto urged to 'step up' for child care in 2018 budget

## **Ottawa ACORN**

Le Droit: Réforme de l'aide sociale: «On ne demande pas la lune!»

Ottawa Citizen: Evicted residents demand more time from developer to find new homes

Le Droit: ACORN veut plus d'alternatives aux prêteurs sur salaire

The PEN Insider: The Campaign for Free and Accessible Transit

CTV News: Heron Gate residents push for better living conditions

## **Ontario ACORN**

CBC: Social assistance clients worry about reforms

Toronto Star: Parents want child care to be provincial election issue

National Post: Ontario must close loopholes that allow landlords to hike rent: groups

Capital News: Ontario's proposed affordable housing rules fall flat, advocates say

TVO: Is the Liberals' affordable-housing plan a 'monstrous failure'?





## BC ACORN

News 1130: BC ACORN awards inaugural 'Demovictor of the Year' award

The Star Vancouver: Burnaby renters 'pressured' to leave in city's 'self-made housing crisis,' report alleges

Burnaby Now: B.C. cuts fees for Burnaby payday loan companies

New West Record: New Westminster taking aim at renovictions

Surrey Now-Leader: Province asks Surrey residents for ideas on reducing poverty

## Nova Scotia ACORN

The Star: Halifax activists call on Eastlink to offer low-income internet options

CTV News: Halifax tenants discuss low income housing issues

CKBW: Atlantic Canadian Telecom Company Opts Out Of Affordable Internet Initiative

Nova Scotia Advocate: MetCaptivated: Metcap Living tenants just

want a decent place to live

News 95.7: Nova Scotia ACORN fights for landlord licensing!

## Hamilton ACORN

The Hamilton Spectator: Tenant advocates call for Hamilton to protect against 'renovictions'

Global News: Advocacy group seeks better protection for Hamilton tenants

Hamilton Spectator: Hamilton poverty looms horribly over campaign

CBC News Hamilton: Tenants say Barton Street 'revitalizers' are neglecting them

Hamilton News: Mountain ACORN chapter being organized





## Peel ACORN

Insauga: Housing Affordability at Crisis Levels in Mississauga, Group Says

Mississauga.com: 'It's not fair': ACORN calls on election candidates to tackle affordable housing in Mississauga

Insauga: Some Residents Worried the Massive LRT Will Hurt Mississauga

Mississauga.com: Peel ACORN and transit union demand Metrolinx provide community benefits for LRT

CBC News: Malton residents rally for improved, more affordable community programs

## ACORN Canada

MobileSyrup: Consumer groups advocate for new code of conduct, suitability rules on day two of CRTC hearings

The Globe and Mail: Topping the list of must-have school supplies: internet access

CBC News: Low-income families qualify for \$10/month internet in new program

CTV News Saskatoon: Action needed on payday loans: ACORN

CBC Radio: How a \$200 payday loan cost over \$31,000





# HIGHLIGHTS & VICTORIES

Federal government introduced the Connecting Families program to provide \$10/month internet for over 200,000 low-income households

## ACORN Canada - National



Built strong opposition to Burnaby demovictions through our long-standing campaign to save Metrotown, and won commitments from newly elected Mayor Mike Hurley and council allies to stop the demovictions.

## BC ACORN



ACORN was a founding member of the Peel Community Benefits Network and began negotiations with Metrolinx on a CBA for the Hurontario LRT.

## **Peel ACORN**

In coalition, won funding for 825 new childcare spaces in Toronto. Community Benefits Agreement with Woodbine, including 3,700 new jobs and \$5 million investment in a childcare centre for Woodbine employees

## **Toronto ACORN**

Won Inclusionary Zoning enabling powers from the Province for all cities in Ontario.

## **Ontario ACORN**



Won a major first step in a 3-year campaign to convince City Council to investigate the possibility of licensing, distancing and capping payday lenders.

Succeeded in making Inclusionary Zoning a municipal election issue supported by a vast majority of candidates. Annual fundraiser Trivial Beersuit raised \$20,000.

First Power Dinner fundraiser raised over \$3,000 and turned out 75 Hamilton ACORN members and allies. Hamilton ACORN now sits on the board of the Community Benefits Network and is seen as a key player.

## Ontario ACORN

## Ottawa ACORN



Successful reorganizing drive in Dartmouth around substandard rental housing, elected a new chair and co-chair for the chapter. Won a meeting with the Minister of Housing in January 2019 to discuss our housing platform.

## Nova Scotia ACORN



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