



## **The Year in Review 2023**

Working for the eradication of poverty in Canada through teaching, research and action that promotes systems change.

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**Canadian Poverty Institute**

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# CANADIAN POVERTY INSTITUTE

## 2023 YEAR IN REVIEW

As we begin 2024 it is a good time to look back and reflect on the accomplishments of the past year. For the Canadian Poverty Institute, 2023 was a year of tremendous activity as we continued to pursue our mission “to advance the eradication of poverty in Canada through research, teaching and action that promotes systems change.” Here are some highlights of our work.



### OUR IMPACT

- Engaged with over 400 people who attended workshops, conference presentations and events delivered or sponsored by the Canadian Poverty Institute.
- Provided training to 75 students enrolled in Poverty Studies courses at Ambrose.
- Connected 65 public, private and non-profit organizations through the Canadian Poverty Institute’s 3 standing Roundtables.
- Managed 4 major research projects focusing on inclusive business, access to insurance, energy poverty, and poverty in Calgary’s Wards.
- Provided strategic and capacity-building support to 3 community organizations.
- Contributed to 5 federal and local public policy initiatives.
- Contributed to 7 national, provincial and local policy and practice networks.
- Informed 20,000 visitors to the Canadian Poverty Institute website.
- Engaged with over 1,300 people through our social media accounts.
- Provided research and information to 2,400 people who accessed 5,000 resources from the online Canadian Poverty Hub.
- The Canadian Poverty Institute was featured in 7 national and local print and broadcast media pieces.

### RESEARCH

- ❖ **Access to Insurance.** For many low-income Canadians, insurance is difficult to obtain and afford, leaving them un- or under-insured. As a result, many are exposed to unnecessary risk, particularly related to severe weather associated with climate change. In 2023, the Canadian Poverty Institute continued its program of research on inclusive insurance. This research builds on the current work of the *Fair Access to Insurance Roundtable* to examine the adequacy of, and barriers to accessing, casualty insurance among low-income persons from equity deserving communities. Through surveys, interviews and focus groups, this project examines the critical barriers to accessing insurance, and best practices for improving insurance coverage among marginalized populations and communities. This project is made possible through the generous support of The Co-operators Insurance Company.

- ❖ **Inclusive Business and SMEs.** Business has enormous potential to contribute to social progress. Not only can business provide good job opportunities, it can also generate social value through inclusive practices as part of its normal business operations. Research has shown that companies that adopt inclusive practices are more profitable and productive in the long run. Yet, despite the business advantages of inclusive practices, many businesses face challenges to adopting them.

Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) face particular challenges to adopting inclusive practices. As the backbone of the Canadian economy, understanding the unique constraints of SMEs and exploring best practices in addressing them may be an important step forward in creating the conditions for decent work and inclusive growth throughout the Canadian economy. To address that knowledge gap, the Canadian Poverty Institute is conducting research with SMEs to identify barriers and develop strategies to increase inclusive business practice adoption. This research is made possible through the generous support of Coast Capital Savings.

- ❖ **Energy Poverty.** For low-income households, the cost of home heating and cooling and other utilities consumes a disproportionate share of their income. This is due to the cost of energy, which has been rapidly rising, as well as the fact that lower-income households often live in the least efficient homes while lacking the resources to improve their efficiency. The burden of high utility costs can result in people living in unhealthy environments, or making other trade-offs that can compromise their physical and mental health and well-being. Over the past year, the Canadian Poverty Institute has been working with its partners to identify best practices in reducing the energy cost burden on low-income households leading to a forthcoming best practices report in 2024.
- ❖ **Calgary Ward Poverty Profiles.** While poverty is often associated with particular neighbourhoods, the reality is that people across the city experience poverty and financial stress. In 2023, the Canadian Poverty Institute collaborated with Vibrant Communities Calgary to paint a picture of poverty in each of Calgary's 14 Wards. Using data from the Census and other local sources, the Ward Poverty Profiles provide a useful statistical portrait of the state of the city. The Ward Poverty Profiles are available online at <https://enoughforall.ca/action/poverty-profiles>.

## **TEACHING**

- ❖ **Poverty Studies.** As a member of the Ambrose University community, the Canadian Poverty Institute contributes to and teaches in the Poverty Studies curriculum at the University as part of an inter-disciplinary Minor in Community Development. In 2023, academic courses taught in the Poverty Studies stream included Poverty in Western Society; Poverty and Human Rights; The Psychological Impacts of Poverty; the Intersection Between Poverty and Government Policy; and Introduction to Community Development. In 2023, a combined total of 75 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in these courses.

- ❖ **Summer Institute.** In 2023, the Canadian Poverty Institute was once again able to host its annual Poverty Studies Summer Institute. This was a welcome return after the previous two programs had to be cancelled due to Covid. The Poverty Studies Summer Institute is a unique study opportunity that brings together students and practitioners into an intimate learning community to explore the causes and impacts of poverty and best practices in how to alleviate and end it. The 2023 program welcomed 75 participants who took part in a range of courses and workshops including:
  - Poverty and Human Rights
  - Purpose and Performance: Engaging Business in Poverty Reduction
  - Gender-based Analysis
  - Poverty Insights from the 2021 Census
  - Eyes to See: Engaging Local Congregations in Poverty Reduction
  - The ART of Hope: A Healing Approach to Ending Poverty
  
- ❖ **Workshops, Webinars and Lectures.** In our work to stimulate public conversations about poverty, the Canadian Poverty Institute collaborated to offer a number of public workshops and webinars. This included:
  - A Celebration of Black History Month
  - Understanding the Depth of Poverty in Canada and Alberta
  - Inclusive Practices for Local Business
  - The Social Impact of Covid 19 on Vulnerable Communities
  - Reimagining Support for Children and Families in Systemic Poverty
  - The ART of Hope: A Healing Approach to Ending Poverty
  
- ❖ **Public Lectures and Conference Presentations.** Sharing the insights of the Canadian Poverty Institute also involved presentations to a number of conferences over the year. In April, a workshop on inclusive business practices was organized as part of the Tamarack Institute’s national *Building Resilient Communities* conference. In September, a keynote address on Food Insecurity as delivered to the St. Mary’s University *Ozanam Conference*. In November, a presentation on precarious employment was made to the *Diversity and Inclusion Conference* organized by the Alberta Network of Immigrant Women. During the year, the CPI also participated on a panel on Climate Change organized as part of the annual Ambrose University Research Conference. Finally, a public lecture on healing poverty was delivered to an audience at The Kings University in Edmonton.

## **PRACTICE**

A key aspect of the mandate of the Canadian Poverty Institute is linking knowledge to practice. Over the past year, this was accomplished through a range of initiatives that connected us with important community stakeholders.

- ❖ **Energy Efficiency for Low-Income Tenants.** In collaboration with the Calgary Housing Company, the Canadian Poverty Institute partnered with Kambo Energy to deliver energy efficiency workshops for low-income tenants. By improving knowledge and home energy efficiency, the burden of utility costs can be eased for those struggling with financial stress. This project was made possible through a generous grant from The City of Calgary and a donation of energy savings kits by Enmax Corporation.
- ❖ **Youth Resiliency Project Evaluation.** In 2023, the Canadian Poverty Institute concluded a multi-year evaluation of the Youth Resiliency Project. The Youth Resiliency Project is an initiative of the Duke of Edinburgh International Award (The Award) that aimed to build resilience among incarcerated or high-risk youth. Learnings from the evaluation will provide insights to The Award and Justice Canada that may inform future programming.
- ❖ **Social Inclusion and Economic Empowerment.** Social exclusion and economic exclusion are often closely related, particularly for racialized persons. Working with Action Dignity, a local organization that advocates on behalf of Calgary's ethno-cultural communities, the Canadian Poverty Institute is advising on a strategy to address economic exclusion.
- ❖ **Sunny Pathways.** Sunny Pathways is a grassroots initiative that aims to improve developmental outcomes of Black children and youth by addressing the root causes of child and family poverty. Working in the school systems of Calgary and shelters for children, the founders of Sunny Pathways observed that the specific needs of Black children and families are not appropriately responded to, contributing to these children falling behind in educational growth and development. Over the past year, the Canadian Poverty Institute has been providing capacity-building support to this fledgling organization to bring their vision to reality.
- ❖ **Policy Engagement.** Over the past year, the Canadian Poverty Institute contributed to important policy discussions at the national and local level. This included participating in the Universal Periodic Review of Canada's human rights commitments, providing feedback and recommendations to the United Nations and the Government of Canada. The Canadian Poverty Institute also provided a submission to the Federal Government as part of the annual federal budget consultation. Locally, the Canadian Poverty Institute also provided input to The City of Calgary for the development of its *Energy Poverty Strategy* as well as its current *Municipal Development Plan Review*.

As the issue of homelessness became more pronounced in 2023 with the growth of homeless encampments in cities across Canada, the Canadian Poverty Institute participated on the National Working Group on Homeless Encampments. This pan-Canadian inter-municipal working group was responsible for developing a *National Protocol on Homeless Encampments* that was recently endorsed by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

- ❖ **Roundtables.** The Canadian Poverty Institute continues to convene, facilitate and support several roundtables that bring together stakeholders from the public, private and non-profit sectors, academia and the community to address specific issues.
  - ***New Economy Roundtable:*** This national Roundtable focuses on supporting business to adopt practices that lead to decent work and a more inclusive economy. In 2023, this Roundtable provided guidance to the previously referenced Inclusive Business and SME research project that aims to understand challenges to adopting inclusive practices faced by Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs).
  - ***Fair Access to Insurance Roundtable.*** This national Roundtable focuses on addressing the Insurance Protection Gap that leaves low-income households un- or under-insured and vulnerable to economic shocks. In 2023, this Roundtable provided guidance to the Inclusive Insurance research project referenced previously. Over the past year, the Roundtable has worked with a consultant to refine its mission and clarify its impact thanks to an Innoweave Grant generously provided by the McConnell Foundation
  - ***Energy Poverty Roundtable.*** This provincial Roundtable brings together utility companies, the provincial and local government, non-profit organizations and community members to address the burden of high utility costs on low-income households. In 2023, this Roundtable provided guidance to the previously mentioned Energy Efficiency for Low-Income Tenants project.
- ❖ **Poverty Hub.** In partnership with York University, the Canadian Poverty Institute manages the Canadian Poverty Hub, an online repository of research and resources about poverty in Canada. In 2023, the Poverty Hub underwent a significant redesign and was relaunched in April. Over the past year, the Poverty Hub was visited by 2,400 users who accessed 5,000 poverty resources.
- ❖ **Network Engagement.** The Canadian Poverty Institute continues to be an active member of a number of national, provincial and local stakeholder networks including:
  - The Canadian Council of Churches - Commission on Justice and Peace
  - Canadian Well-being Knowledge Network
  - Housing Policy Research Exchange
  - Tamarack Institute national Communities Ending Poverty (CEP) network
  - Alberta Poverty Reduction Network
  - Calgary Social Policy Community of Practice
  - Vibrant Communities Calgary – Enough for All champions network
- ❖ **Media and Communications.** In 2023, the Canadian Poverty Institute was highlighted in various national and local media. In February, an Opinion piece was published in the Calgary Herald arguing for the Right to Refuge of unsheltered persons in public spaces during extreme weather. The Canadian Poverty Institute was also interviewed by the CBC and CTV national news networks for comment on

Canada's grocery rebate, disability supports, and impact of inflation on lower income Canadians. Other independent news outlets also sought comment on issues such as food insecurity and seniors poverty. The Canadian Poverty Institute was also profiled in the national periodical *Faith Today*.

The Canadian Poverty Institute also maintains an online presence through its website which recorded 20,000 unique visitors and 36,000 page views in 2023, and social media accounts (LinkedIn and Twitter) with a combined followership of 1,300 people. Our periodic newsletter *Spero* also reaches over 200 readers. In 2023, special issues of *Spero* focused on child poverty and the racialization of poverty.

## **GOVERNANCE**

In 2023, the Canadian Poverty Institute released its new 5-year Strategic Plan. The new Strategic Plan clarifies the mission and mandate of the Institute and establishes priorities for the 2023-28 period. Included in the new Strategic Plan is a series of Principles that guide our work. These principles are:

- **Prioritizing the voice of lived experienced:** We believe that those with a lived experienced of an issue are the first experts of it. We value that and deliberately incorporate this input into our work.
- **Rights-based:** We understand poverty to be a violation of economic, social and cultural rights.
- **Anti-oppressive:** We work to dismantle systems of oppression and affirm the right of all people to live free of domination of any kind.
- **Inclusive:** We strive to make our work free of discrimination and welcoming of diverse perspectives.
- **Inter-disciplinarity:** We predicate our research on knowledge from various disciplines (as relevant) because we recognize that anti-poverty work intrinsically cuts across knowledge divides.
- **Systems-change:** We work to remove barriers, bridge gaps and enhance processes in anti-poverty work.
- **Equity:** We strive to create conditions that enable all people to achieve their material, social and spiritual wellbeing, particularly those who have been marginalized, and oppressed.

Through 2023, the Canadian Poverty Institute also underwent a governance review, leading to a series of recommendations to strengthen our governance to better represent the perspectives of our constituents. The review also made recommendations on clarifying and strengthening the relationship between the Institute and Ambrose University, our host organization. These recommendations will be acted upon in the coming year.



## ***OUR TEAM***

The Canadian Poverty Institute gratefully acknowledges the contributions of its dedicated staff team. In 2023, the CPI bid farewell to Researcher Laura Nauta and was simultaneously privileged to welcome our new Researcher Rudo Makoni. The CPI also recognizes the ongoing efforts of Dr. Rita Yembilah, Senior Researcher; Rita Diaz, Research Assistant; and Derek Cook, Director. In addition to the staff team, the CPI was also privileged to work with various interns and practicum students from Ambrose University, the University of Calgary and Mount Royal University. The CPI is also grateful for the contributions of the Faculty Associates who are members of Ambrose University faculty whose work aligns with and supports the mandate of the CPI.

## ***OUR SUPPORTERS***

The Canadian Poverty Institute gratefully acknowledges the monetary and in-kind contributions from a range of community partners including:

- ❖ Action Dignity
- ❖ Ambrose University
- ❖ Anonymous Donors
- ❖ The City of Calgary
- ❖ Coast Capital Savings
- ❖ Compassion Canada
- ❖ The Co-operators Insurance Company
- ❖ The Duke of Edinburgh Award
- ❖ Enmax Corporation
- ❖ Kambo Energy Group
- ❖ The McConnell Foundation
- ❖ The Ontario Trillium Foundation
- ❖ Vibrant Communities Calgary

## ***ABOUT US***

The Canadian Poverty Institute is an inter-disciplinary institute housed within Ambrose University with a mandate to enable key stakeholders to effectively address systemic causes of poverty by connecting knowledge to practice.

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