

Intermunicipal Poverty Reduction Advisory Committee

Strategic Plan 2023



DRAFT

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Message from the Chairs

As municipally elected officials, we continue to hear firsthand from the people that they are struggling.

It can be overwhelming when we take an honest look at the complexity of the problems facing us. It can also be frightening to maintain hope while the world struggles to support basic human needs like food and shelter. Frightening, because understanding these issues requires us to be honest with ourselves. Vulnerability is not something that comes naturally to many of us. Yet, it is absolutely necessary if we are to come to terms with our own emotions that may act as barriers when helping others.

Doing this collectively, at the community level, can be even more difficult as each of us face unique challenges in our daily lives. The purpose of this committee is to find a more sustainable, community-based and collaborative approach that brings us back to knowing our neighbours and promotes working together as a means to avoid a polarizing narrative that perpetuates stigma around those living with poverty.

We, as the government who are closest to the people, feel a sense of urgency as we try to respond to sensitive social issues. Collectively, we owe a duty to our constituents to learn about our respective communities and understand their unique needs. Ideally, an ongoing process of learning will allow us to raise awareness and speak loudly to all levels of government on behalf of all our citizens who we do our best to serve.

Emphasizing the needs of those who have traditionally had their voices ignored due to impacts of living with poverty requires us to reflect on how our municipalities have governed our communities in the past. Change can be difficult, but it is essential if we are to ensure all of our community members feel heard and supported.

Leon Landry, Town of Amherst, Deputy Mayor
Jennifer Houghtaling, Cumberland County, Councillor
Carla Black, Town of Oxford, Councillor



Introduction

In Nova Scotia, poverty is prevalent. In fact, as of 2019, more than 41,230 children in this province are living at or below the poverty line. It should also be noted that Nova Scotia has one of the highest rates of disabled persons, at about 30% of the overall population. Here in Cumberland County, the towns of Amherst and Oxford, the overall rate of poverty is greater than the provincial average.

Immediate, achievable steps need to be taken to ensure the goals of poverty reduction are met. During the last two decades many government and not-for-profit organizations have worked individually or in collaboration with each other to deliver services for those living in poverty. These attempts are largely focused on managing poverty as opposed to eradicating it. While many positive initiatives resulted from the hard work further efforts are required if we are to meet the Sustainable Development Goals as outlined by the United Nations.

The Municipal Government Act of Nova Scotia states:

Purposes of a municipality

9A The purposes of a municipality are to

- (a) provide good government;*
- (b) provide services, facilities and other things that, in the opinion of the council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the municipality; and*
- (c) develop and maintain safe and viable communities. 2019, c. 19,*

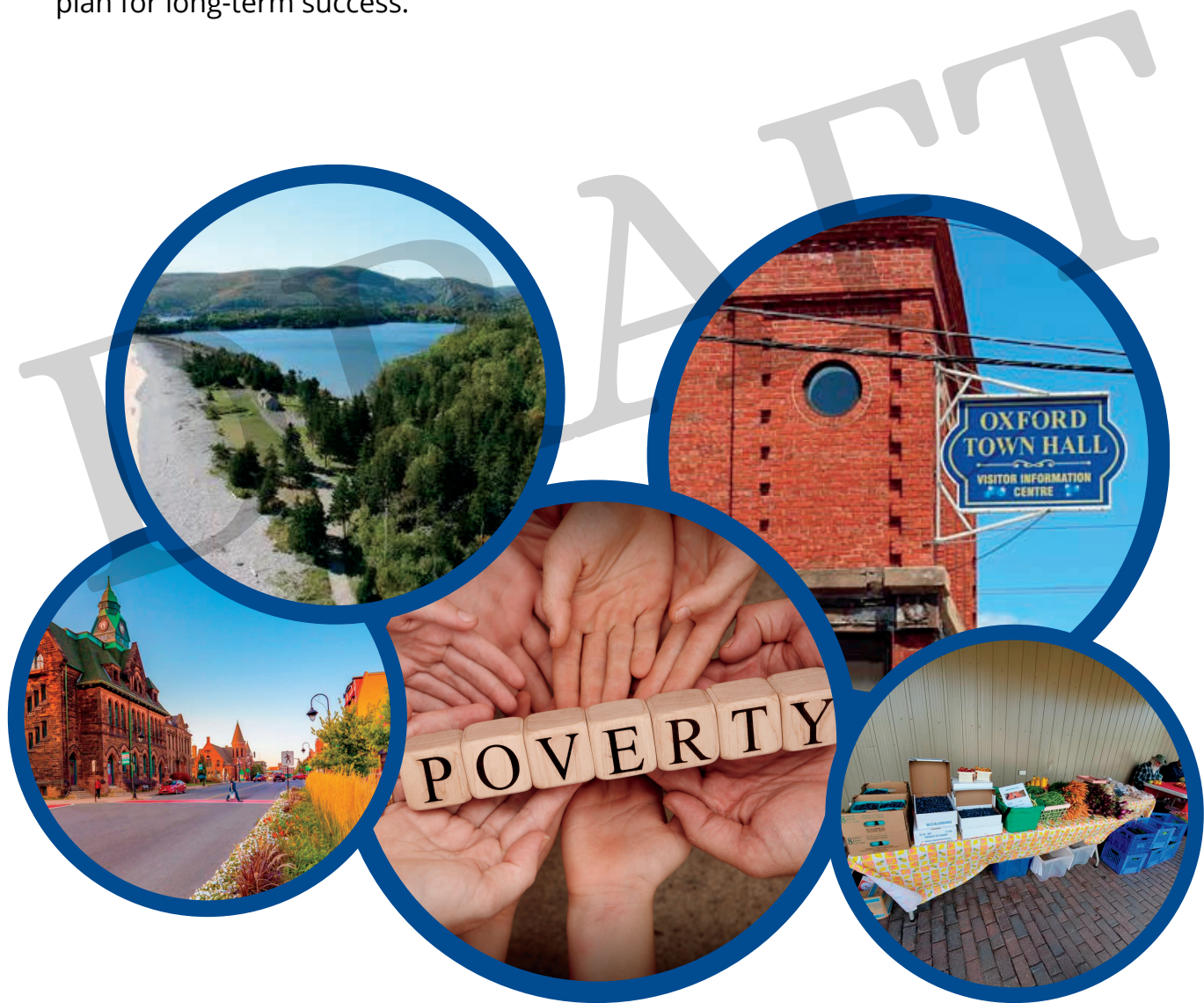
In keeping with Section 9A, Subsection b and c, the Intermunicipal Poverty Reduction Advisory Committee (Committee) was developed to conceptualize, outline and develop a strategic plan to tackle the broad and overreaching outcome of poverty reduction. Its members include council members from the Municipal Governments of Amherst, Oxford and Cumberland County, community stakeholders and interested parties.

This strategic plan outlines short, medium and long-term goals that primarily focus on reducing the number of people experiencing poverty in our region. Additionally, our goal structure will include actions aimed at reducing the impact of poverty through strategies based on principles of harm reduction (a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences while maintaining the respect and rights of the impacted individuals).

Poverty reduction initiatives contribute to meeting Canada's international human rights obligations, contained in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;

The progress made by Canada in the reduction of poverty contributes to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations;

A key component of a successful poverty reduction strategy is bringing together multi-sector stakeholders to work on a shared vision that offers a realistic, measurable action plan for long-term success.



United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 1-4

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Targets include eradicating extreme poverty; implementing social protection measures; and ensuring equal access of men and women to economic resources.

- Right to an adequate standard of living
[UDHR art. 25; ICESCR art. 11; CRC art. 27]
- Right to social security
[UDHR art. 22; ICESCR art. 9; CRPD art. 28; CRC art. 26]
- Equal rights of women in economic life
[CEDAW arts. 11, 13, 14(2)(g), 15(2), 16(1)]



2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture

Targets include ending hunger and malnutrition; improving agricultural production, sustainable and resilient food production; correcting trade distortions, and ensuring functioning food commodity markets.

- Right to adequate food
[UDHR art. 25; ICESCR art. 11; CRC art. 24(2)(c)]
- International cooperation, including ensuring equitable distribution of world food supplies
[UDHR art. 28; ICESCR arts. 2(1), 11(h2)]



3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well – being for all at all ages

Targets include reducing maternal mortality; ending preventable child deaths; ending or reducing AIDS other diseases; universal health coverage, affordable essential medicines, sexual and reproductive health care; vaccine research, and access to medicines.

- Right to life [UDHR art. 3; ICCPR art. 6], particularly of women [CEDAW art. 12] and children [CRC art. 6]
- Right to health [UDHR art. 25; ICESCR art. 12], particularly of women [CEDAW art. 12]; and children [CRC art.24]
- Special protection for mothers and children [ICESCR art.10]
- Right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its application [UDHR art. 27; ICESCR art. 15(1)(b)]
- International cooperation [UDHR art. 28, DRtD arts. 3-4], particularly in relation to the right to health and children's rights [ICESCR art. 2(1); CRC art. 4]



4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all

Targets include universal access to free, quality pre-primary, primary and secondary education; improving vocational skills; equal access to education; expanding education facilities, scholarships, and training of teachers.

- Right to education [UDHR art. 26; ICESCR art. 13], particularly in relation to children [CRC arts. 28, 29]; persons with disabilities [CRC art. 23(3), CRPD art. 24]; and indigenous peoples [UNDRIP art. 14]
- Equal rights of women and girls in the field of education [CEDAW art. 10]
- Right to work, including technical and vocational training [ICESCR art. 6]
- International cooperation [UDHR art. 28; DRtD arts. 3-4], particularly in relation to children [CRC arts. 23(4), 28(3)], persons with disabilities [CRPD art. 32], and indigenous peoples [UNDRIP art. 14]



Guiding Principles

The guiding principles of this strategy involve the theory that basic human needs of an individual must be met before their full potential can be achieved. These needs supersede all others and can be summarized as below.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

In a 1943 paper titled "A Theory of Human Motivation," American psychologist Abraham Maslow theorized that human decision-making is undergirded by a hierarchy of psychological needs. In his initial paper and a subsequent 1954 book titled *Motivation and Personality*, Maslow proposed that five core needs form the basis for human behavioral motivation.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory of motivation. It states that five categories of human needs dictate an individual's behavior. Those needs are physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization needs.

Maslow's theory presents his hierarchy of needs in a pyramid, with basic needs at the bottom of the pyramid and more high-level, intangible needs at the top. A person can only move on to addressing the higher-level needs when their basic needs are adequately fulfilled.

Deficiency Needs versus Growth Needs on Maslow's Hierarchy

Maslow referred to self-actualization as a "growth need." He separated it from the lower four levels on his hierarchy, which he called "deficiency needs." According to his theory, if you fail to meet your deficiency needs, you'll experience harmful or unpleasant results.

Conditions ranging from illness and starvation up through loneliness and self-doubt are the by-products of unmet deficiency needs. By contrast, self-actualization needs can make you happier, but you are not harmed when these needs go unfulfilled. Thus, self-actualization needs only become a priority when the other four foundational needs are met.



Social Determinants of Health

The concept of social determinants of health can be drawn from the premise that health begins where we live, learn, work and play. That is, the health of a community is promoted or undermined by its inhabitants' location and living conditions, educational attainment and opportunities, income and levels of accumulated assets or wealth and by other socioeconomic and political factors.

From: Principles and Practice of Clinical Research (Third Edition), 2012



Ethical Practices

Recognizing the nature of when individuals lack basic human needs, this strategic plan, its data collection, interpretation and developed strategies have been carried out with the utmost respect for the individuals, honouring their privacy and ensuring the lens of compassion is used.

Our goal is to recognize the needs of our collective communities, build strong strategic relationships and plans to reduce poverty and the effects of generational poverty and to put in place real measures to ensure this work is carried out for the most positive impact. In addition, appropriate plans are developed for the evaluation of measures taken and future direction.

According to the 2021 Nova Scotia Child and Family Poverty Report Card, 32% of children ages 0-17 in Amherst, 37.1 in Springhill, 30% in Oxford, 24.4% in Parrsboro, 38.5% in River Hebert live in poverty. Overall, the number of children living in poverty in Nova Scotia amounts to 24.2% or close to 1 in 4 children.

As the report card details:

- Nova Scotia's child poverty rate in 2019 was 24.3%, down from 24.6% in 2018 (a 1.2% decrease).
- 41,230 children are living in poverty in Nova Scotia
- Almost 1 in 4 children in Nova Scotia live in poverty.
- 24.4% was the child poverty rate in 1989, when the promise was made to eradicate child poverty by the year 2000, which means poverty has only been reduced by 0.1 of a percentage point in Nova Scotia during the past 30 years.
- 27.8% was the child poverty rate in Nova Scotia in the year 2000, when it was supposed to be eradicated.



2022 Living wages in Nova Scotia

Life should not be a constant struggle. Yet, for many Nova Scotians that is their reality and the challenge to make ends meet is even tougher this year. Between June 2021 and June 2022, consumer prices in Nova Scotia increased 9.3%.

The last time inflation was this high in the province was in July 1982 (9.8%). Year over year, rental costs increased 8.2%. Nova Scotians paid 60.5% more for gasoline in June than the previous year. Food costs increased 8.8% over last year at this time.

Dealing with cost increases is possible if your income is keeping up. That is not the case for the average worker in Nova Scotia. The average weekly earnings only increased by 4.1% from January-June 2021 to January-June 2022. This gap between increases in wages and inflation represents an actual cut to wages of nearly 5% on average, which is significant, especially when we have the second lowest average weekly earnings in the country after Prince Edward Island (\$1,000.63 or \$26.89 hourly in June 2022). The lowest average weekly earnings in Nova Scotia were in the accommodation/food service sector at \$486.99 (\$16.23 hourly).

Workers have been running in place for a long time, struggling to provide for themselves and their families, even during decades when inflation was relatively low. Median overall wage growth adjusted for inflation between 2001 to 2019 was just 11.3% (\$18.75 to \$20.87 expressed in 2021 dollars).

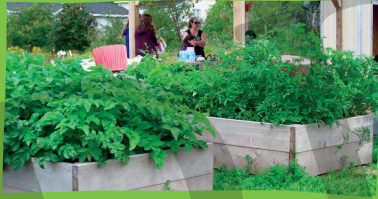
Given current inflation rates, workers need immediate support. We must ensure they share in the prosperity they produce. Workers struggle with sharp increases in the cost of essentials like rent, food and gas.

Nova Scotia's living wages are calculated annually to reflect changing living expenses. Nova Scotia's living wage rates for 2022 are: Annapolis Valley (\$22.40), Cape Breton (\$20.00), Halifax (\$23.50), Northern (\$20.40) and Southern (\$22.55). The wages all increased from between 5% and 8%.

These increases are due to cost increases - for shelter, food, gas, in particular - and little improvement in tax credits or income transfers. The living wage is the hourly rate at which a household can meet its basic needs (the expenses in the living wage budget), once government transfers are added to the family's income, such as the Canada Child Benefit or GST credit, and deductions have been subtracted, such as income taxes and Employment Insurance premiums. This year's calculations underline the importance of ensuring government income transfers are adequate and that our tax system is progressive.

Strategic Pillars

Food Security



Housing and Homelessness



Youth Outreach and Education



Food Security



Strategic Goals

1 . Increase opportunities to put nutritious affordable food into individual and family's hands

Action Plan	Desired Outcome	Timeframe	Lead/supporting
A) Partner with local businesses/non-profits to establish pilot projects related to food security (examples could be: community greenhouses, gardens, edible forests, square roots)	Numerous options for locally grown nutritious food are available	One year	PRAC/Staff
B) Explore new technologies for food security through research/innovation at universities.	New innovative solutions to food insecurity will be identified	Ongoing during the next 24 months	PRAC/Staff
C) Support community groups through local support grants to host community suppers in their area	Increased number of community meal kitchens. One in each community	One year	Co-Chairs/Staff
D) Support the development of community gardens	Increase in number of community gardens around the county	One year	Council/ Co-Chairs/ Staff
E) Install food pantries in various locations around the community	Food pantries installed in each community/ town	One year	Committee/Staff
F) Support local food banks, after the bell school programs	More robust support systems will be in place	One to two years	Committee/Staff

Strategic Goals

2. Work with Provincial and Federal Governments to support the implantation of a basic living wage and increase employment support/income assistance for single parents and disabled persons

Action Plan	Desired Outcome	Timeframe	Lead/supporting
A) Draft letter to Prime Minister	Letter sent to the Prime Minister	One year	Committee/ Council/ Staff
B) Partner with other organizations to be a collective voice	Stakeholders will be united in the Cumberland Region to speak with one voice	One year	Committee/ Council/ Staff

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Housing



Strategic Goals 1 . Support new housing development that has a supported affordable housing commitment

Action Plan	Desired Outcome	Timeframe	Lead/supporting
A) Support non-profit organizations with housing/homelessness developments	Strong partnership is developed between non-profit organizations and Municipal units	One year	Council and Committee Co-Chairs
B) Review existing bylaws and identify areas where actions could be taken to improve accessibility for non profits	Review of bylaws completed. Areas identified to reduce barriers to non-profits	One year	Council and Committee Co-Chairs

Strategic Goals 2 . Engage community groups and businesses to participate in creating safe spaces for the vulnerable in housing

Action Plan	Desired Outcome	Timeframe	Lead/supporting
A) Host meeting with community stakeholders	Host two meetings per year, one Town and one County/ Oxford. Funding will be contributed	Ongoing	Committee/Staff
B) Contribute to funding for the development of emergency housing shelter (if required)	Emergency shelter open	Ongoing	Committee/Council/ Staff

Strategic Goals 3 . Develop and promote anti-stigma campaign regarding homelessness

Action Plan	Desired Outcome	Timeframe	Lead/supporting
A) Circulate information and promote through multi-media awareness	Campaign will highlight stigmas around homelessness and seek to reach all members of our communities	One year	Committee/Staff

Strategic Goals**4 . Education awareness campaign of energy poverty**

Action Plan	Desired Outcome	Timeframe	Lead/supporting
A) Adjust Property Assessed Clean Energy program to be more accessible	Property Assessed Clean Energy program will be adjusted	One year	Committee/Staff
B) Request a partnership or copy Colchester's solar homes and cozy Colchester programs and advertise	Meet with Colchester regarding their initiatives around heat poverty	ASAP	Committee/Staff
C) Review low-income exemption amounts and adjust annually	Exemptions will be reviewed	ASAP	Committee/Staff/ Council

Youth Outreach and Education



Strategic Goals

1. Increase opportunities for Youth Engagement

Action Plan	Desired Outcome	Timeframe	Lead/supporting
A) Establish Community Neighbourhood Round Tables (have Tamarack Institute coach us for this) with youth/senior representation.	Meetings will be conducted utilizing partnerships with Maggie's Place, Youth Development Centre, Amherst Youth Town Council, Cumberland County Youth Council and other interested youth professionals	Six months	Co-chairs committee/Staff
	Comprehensive list of all youth resources will be developed and made available to community stakeholders. Identified programs will be developed using existing and new resources through partnerships made through the Round Table meetings	One year	Committee/Staff
B) Identify needs for mentorship programs	Report generated on needs assessment	One year	Committee/Staff
C) Advocate for Skills Development 02 Program in all high schools in our municipalities. Develop list of youth educational resources aimed at tutoring/mentorship and life skills development	Life skills/ employment development programs will be created	One year	Committee/Staff

Strategic Goals

2. Conduct presentations in grades 7 to 12 on stigma around poverty and why volunteering and grassroots community development is important.

Action Plan

A) Develop presentations

B) Engage Amherst Youth Town Council and Cumberland County Youth Council in identify schools/classes to speak to

Desired Outcome

Presentations developed in partnership with AYTC and Cumberland County Youth Council

Timeframe

One year

Lead/supporting

Committee/Staff

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Community Outreach & Engagement Strategy

The Poverty Reduction Advisory Committee will consult with individuals in Cumberland County regarding the three pillars of focus identified in this document. It is imperative to gather community feedback from a first voice perspective to help inform the process moving forward. The strategic plan is a living document that will be fluid over time to allow input to factor in future decision making. The Committee will endeavor to create a climate of connectivity between municipal units and those who are currently working on poverty reduction initiatives.

Reporting Strategy

Reporting will be done quarterly that captures the successes of the plan in that period and identifies any challenges faced with suggestions on improvements. This will ensure the ongoing attention to the work plan and identify any new challenges are addressed immediately keeping the strategy as a living document.

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