

# SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES, SKILLS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: STUDY OF POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGIES

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## A GAME CHANGER APPROACH FOR CITIES REDUCING POVERTY

### VIBRANT COMMUNITIES CANADA

Opportunity is in front of us. Across Canada, cities and provinces are uniting to reduce poverty. These cities are knit together in a collaboration called Vibrant Communities Canada – Cities Reducing Poverty. This collaboration of cities rests on five core principles: aim for poverty reduction over poverty alleviation; work comprehensively to address root causes of poverty; build on the existing assets in a community; bring people together from all sectors; and learn together to scale up change.

This collaboration is committed to significantly reducing the human, social and economic costs of poverty. Through a connected learning community of 100 communities, our shared goal is to align our poverty reduction strategies and build collaboration between cities, all provinces and the Federal government, resulting in reduced poverty for one million Canadians.

#### We envision:

- We envision all Canadians collectively committing to action that will significantly reduce and ultimately eliminate poverty in our communities.
- We envision a Canada where everyone has access to adequate and affordable housing, income, nutrition, education, and opportunities to participate in community life.

#### We believe:

- Poverty can be significantly reduced in Canada.
- Poverty is a complex condition involving many social, economic, systemic, physical causes.
- Local communities and cities play a critical role in poverty reduction.
- Every Canadian benefits when poverty is reduced; everyone has a role to play in poverty reduction.
- People with lived experience of poverty should play an active role in planning and decision making.
- The cost of poverty is not only personal; there are social and economic costs to Canada as a whole.
- Reducing poverty is a shared responsibility requiring collective and concrete action.

**We value:**

- **Voice for Everyone:** Every person has the right to live in dignity, make their own decisions in life, and fully participate in society. Policies, systems and solutions must respect and include everyone in the community.
- **Multi-Sector Collaboration:** Sustainable poverty reduction is best addressed through collaboration across all sectors and includes people with lived experience of poverty to harness diverse perspectives and solutions.
- **Comprehensive Approach:** Poverty reduction is a long-term process focused on tackling root causes through a strengths based, multisector, collective impact approach to planning and change.
- **Collective Impact:** Information and evidence from available data, community consultations, research, and effective practices from across Canada informs solutions and communicates impact.

**Reducing or ending poverty is the music we want to create and listen to. How can we lessen the noise that envelopes us and increase our capacity to make this music together?**

**THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL EFFORTS IN REDUCING POVERTY**

Local, comprehensive, and multi-sectoral approaches to reducing poverty are instrumental in raising the profile of poverty in the community, building a constituency for change, encouraging collaborative ways for working, shifting systems that underlay poverty, and generating changes that support people to move out of poverty. These local efforts require the support of provincial and federal governments, for example to support communities to develop multi-sectoral roundtables, implement Collective Impact approaches, and design and deliver local poverty reduction strategies. To maximize their effectiveness, reach, and impact, they must be allocated sufficient time, resources and capacities to achieve transformational impact.

**CHALLENGES OF MEASURING POVERTY REDUCTION IN PAN-CANADIAN EFFORTS**

A wealth of unique challenges exists in measuring and evaluating the poverty reduction efforts of a Pan-Canadian movement. Programs and activities are delivered at community, municipal, and provincial levels, across rural and urban areas, and across a diverse range of population groups. Many efforts are underfunded and under-staffed, and while well-intentioned, often attempt to tackle a large number of priority areas, which can leave work ‘a mile wide and an inch deep.’ With respect to evaluation, a persistent assumption exists of the need to prove that outcomes are the products of an organization’s own work.

Drawing on over 15 years of learning, Vibrant Communities Canada has developed a strategy that poverty reduction practitioners across the country can adopt to hone in on shared priorities, and measure progress in a way that allows us to track our collective impact in poverty reduction nationwide. We do this through an innovative ‘Game Changer’ approach to poverty reduction strategy and evaluation.

**DEFINING POVERTY REDUCTION GAME CHANGERS**

A poverty reduction ‘Game Changer’ is a priority area or strategy that not only aims to deliver on its own specific goals or outcomes, but also elicits an array of other significant, positive outcomes that cascade both within and outside of its area of emphasis, and consequently, profoundly impacts the course, character, or extent of poverty experienced by people, both individually and collectively.

For example, optimally addressing the need for more safe and affordable housing would have positive influences on socialization, community participation, stabilization of health problems, job hunting, and access to support services.

**Vibrant Communities Canada (VCC)’s poverty reduction Game Changers:**

- Are built on principles of collective leadership and collective impact, and involve the entire community.
- Tackle the root causes of poverty, with a focus on upstream action and long-term thinking, working to eliminate poverty rather than alleviate it, and striving for sustainable, systemic change.
- Support strong, supportive and inclusive communities that promote people to live with dignity and self-sufficiency, and that enable people to participate fully in the decisions and activities that affect their communities.

**POVERTY REDUCTION GAME CHANGER PRINCIPLES**

- **Clarify and Advance Collective Impact Efforts:** Bringing together multi-sector players to work on a shared aspiration that offers the potential to have large scale, sustainable impact clearly has growing traction across communities. Understanding Game Changers clarifies the work of Collective Impact efforts, and simplifies priority setting in poverty reduction work and in related funding streams.
- **Emphasizing Progress Over Proof:** By focusing on progress in our evaluation of poverty reduction work, outcomes become visions, explicit aspirations, and about our commitment to allocating our limited resources to strategic imperatives.
- **From Attribution toward Contribution:** The Game Changer approach focuses on the extent to which an organization or its program/service contributed to the realization of the outcome, as opposed to whether its desired outcome was achieved. The goal becomes the understanding of one’s impact on the overall achievement.
- **Policy and Political Possibilities:** A network of local communities focused on local and network-wide Game Changers would support governments, funders, and the public with clarity in how systems reform or policy changes could support, and even create, game-changing benefits for citizens.
- **Game Changers as Movement Makers:** The public will struggle to rally behind a plan with dozens of priorities and myriad strategies and actions. The Game Changer approach engages the general public in a compelling cause that, while complex, is easy to understand.
- **Learning is Paramount:** The richness of the learning that evaluations can provide is as important as assessing progress toward game-changing aspirations. Evaluations should point to what is working, what needs improvement, and what needs to stop or slow down.

**VIBRANT COMMUNITIES CANADA’S EIGHT POVERTY REDUCTION GAME CHANGERS**



**#1 – INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT**  
 Income security through employment and non-employment sources, and readiness for, access to, and retention of secure, livable wage jobs where employer policies support employees’ needs.

**#2 – HOUSING**  
 Affordable, accessible and appropriate housing that meets people’s unique needs, affordable utility costs, housing retention supports, and protection from eviction.



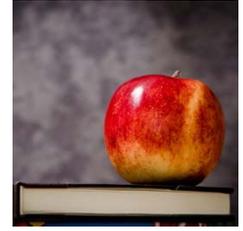


**#3 – TRANSPORTATION**

Affordable and accessible public transportation and innovative rural solutions that accommodate and cater to individuals with unique needs.

**#4 – EDUCATION**

Literacy, graduation from high school or equivalency, affordable and accessible post-secondary education, and opportunities for alternative learning supports.



**#5 – HEALTH**

Affordable and accessible health care services that are not covered under provincial/territorial medical plans, and comprehensive, inclusive supports for physical and mental health.

**#6 – EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT**

Healthy early child development, school readiness, strong parenting skills, and access to affordable and regulated childcare spaces.



**#7 – FOOD SECURITY**

Affordable, accessible, sufficient, and nutritious food that meets dietary needs for an active and healthy life.

**#8 – FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT**

Accessible mainstream banking services, protection from fraud and predatory lending, and ability to build savings/assets, improve credit ratings, and reduce debt.



**LENSES EMPLOYED IN THE GAME CHANGER APPROACH**

Lenses employed in this approach cross-cut all Game Changer areas.

- **Human Rights** – A human rights approach to poverty reduction states that human rights are inalienable and universal, and that every human being has, and must be able to access civil, cultural, - economic, social and political rights. Ensuring that each person is able to access basic rights and freedoms is essential for people to live with dignity and to participate fully in society.
- **Inclusion** – Inclusion incorporates protection from racism and discrimination, availability of stable social support, equitable access to information, services and resources, and opportunity for people to influence decisions that affect them. Inclusion in one’s community is essential in reducing vulnerability, promoting self-sufficiency, building resilience, and enhancing power in one’s community interactions.

**LEVERS EMPLOYED IN THE GAME CHANGER APPROACH**

- **Individual and Household Assets:** Internal and external resources that individuals and households can draw upon to meet their ongoing needs and aspirations, and that create pathways for people out of poverty.
- **Community Assets:** Enduring resources realized through community, non-profit, or employer initiatives that benefit different individuals and households in poverty over time (e.g. affordable housing units, child care spaces, living wage jobs).
- **Policy Change:** Changes in organizational or government policy, programs and procedures related to poverty reduction. This includes issues formally recognized as priorities, development and

implementation of strategies and plans, and changes and enhancements to the design and delivery of programs or services.

- **Systems Change:** Changes in services and procedures that create a more flexible, integrated and responsive service and support system. This includes streamlining of services across departments, enhanced multi-sectoral collaborations, the creation of mechanisms to facilitate design and delivery of supports, creating opportunities for people with lived experience to shape programs, enhanced funding strategies, and monetary amounts allocated to this work.

## ABOUT MARK HOLMGREN

As the Director of Vibrant Communities Canada, Mark leads Tamarack’s engagement of the Cities Reducing Poverty network. He teaches at Tamarack Learning Gatherings in the areas of Collective Impact, Community Innovation, Collaborative Leadership, Community Engagement, and Poverty Reduction. Mark also provides custom services to communities that are mobilizing to create a poverty reduction initiative or that are seeking support and guidance in their current work.

Prior to coming to Tamarack, Mark led a team of 120 people at Bissell Centre, a multi service non-profit whose vision is to end poverty in the community. He served on Mayor Don Iveson’s Task Force to End Poverty in a Generation and also co-chaired its working group on Housing and Transportation.

Mark is known for his big picture thinking and his ability to work on the ground. A proven innovator, he has designed or led the design of social housing programs for the marginalized; assertive outreach to street involved people; and an eviction prevention program that prevents homelessness. A voracious writer, you can read his work on the Tamarack and Vibrant Canada websites as well as his own blog, Anticipate!

## ABOUT TAMARACK INSTITUTE

Tamarack Institute is a registered Canadian charity founded in 2002 as an institute committed to deeply understanding community change and helping organizations and citizens work better together for collective impact. Over the past 14 years, Tamarack has grown in size and influence to become a Canadian leader that provides engaging learning opportunities and resources for community leaders seeking innovative ways to strengthen their communities and address complex issues together.

[www.tamarackcommunity.ca](http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca).

## GAME CHANGER RESOURCES

**Article:** [Sometimes to Hear the Music you Have to Turn Down the Noise](#)

**Series:** [Exploring Poverty Reduction Game Changer Series](#)

**Webinar:** [A Game Changer Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategy and Evaluation](#)

**Blog:** [More about the Game-Changer Approach to Poverty Reduction](#)

## APPENDIX I: VCC'S POVERTY REDUCTION GAME CHANGER EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

