

# Uniting Communities for Justice



ACORN Canada  
Year End Report 2012  
[www.acorncanada.org](http://www.acorncanada.org)

## Executive Summary

In 2012 ACORN Canada engaged 804 new full members and 6,697 members in total. To date we have over 51,000 members, in 20 chapters in seven cities across the country, including new chapters in Nova Scotia. Our members are engaged and fighting to creating positive social, economic and ecological justice in their communities.

Across the country we held 270 events turning out 3,301 people. That's five events every week, where we focused on building community leaders and strengthening community capacity to lobby for change in many different areas.



## CAMPAIGNS

### Remittance Justice

Our Remittance Justice campaign continued to build support this year, with its biggest endorsement yet – in May, Ontario MPP Jagmeet Singh, in partnership with ACORN Canada, introduced precedent-setting Bill 98, which would cap remittance fees charged by money transfer organizations at 5%, as well as promoting more transparency in the industry so that customers know where their money is going. This summer ACORN Canada released a report on a survey of remittance users in Ontario. The campaign received editorial endorsements from *Toronto Star*, *Ottawa Citizen*, *Share*, *CBC International* and *Ottawa Metro*.

In BC, NDP MP Peter Julien agreed to champion the issue of remittance fees in Parliament. A parliamentary petition is being circulated, which will start the official question of the Federal Finance Ministry on the lack of any regulations.

### Healthy Homes

Our Healthy Homes campaign picked up steam in 2012.

In BC, members achieved a big victory in Surrey: Surrey City Council unanimously passed a standard of maintenance bylaw for rental units.

The union of BC Municipalities passed a healthy homes motion, calling on the Ministry of Housing to amend the Residential Tenancy Act and regulations to enforce healthy homes standards for tenants in BC. Due to a growing





campaign, BC ACORN has become recognized as an important stakeholder in any policy discussion at the Ministry of Housing in regards to market rental housing.

In September, thanks to pressure from BC ACORN members and allies including Pivot Legal Society, ACORN leader Susan Collard won a precedent-setting RTB decision granting her the right to return to her suite (from which she had been evicted). This was the first time ever in BC and hopefully will set the tone for things to come.

Ottawa ACORN launched a municipal Healthy Homes campaign this year, focusing on the enforcement and creation of new tenant rights bylaws. As a result of leaders' and members' activities, Mayor Jim Watson of Ottawa has committed to working with ACORN on our Healthy Homes campaign, along with several city councillors. Ottawa ACORN is working with City By-Law to improve enforcement protocols.

Ottawa ACORN also won \$100,000 worth of repairs in their housing intake program in partnership with the University of Ottawa Law Faculty, Social Justice Caucus.

ACORN Canada was very excited this year about the development of our new regional office in Nova Scotia. NS ACORN held Healthy Homes membership drives in Cape Breton and Dartmouth, focusing on the deplorable condition of members' homes.

In Toronto, members worked to build on the success of their ongoing Healthy Homes campaign. In 2010 members won a commitment from the City of Toronto to begin, proactively inspecting rental housing. In 2012, with the change in council in 2011, members began working to remove newly implemented road blocks to proactive inspections. Toronto ACORN held a provincial housing forum in May, attended by over 60 members, to pressure the provincial government to implement full rent control and to improve enforcement in substandard housing. The forum was attended by the Deputy Housing Minister and the NDP Housing Critic. The forum was followed by a meeting with Ontario ACORN leaders and Housing Minister Kathleen Wynne, who was unresponsive to demands.



## Disability Rights and Social Assistance



Our BC member-created Disability Rights Group was very active in 2012, holding actions throughout Metro Vancouver, specifically targeted at increasing PWD rates and cutting the red tape to make benefits more accessible to disabled people. The DRG attracted attention and new members in actions at the Ministry for Social Development, and won a meeting in the new year with the Minister, Mark Stillwell, to discuss their demands. Monthly actions are being planned for 2013.



Ottawa ACORN members led a spirited drive to fix social assistance in the province of Ontario, starting with a huge action at Premier Dalton McGuinty's office in March, when close to 100 people gathered to protest freezing social assistance rates. The action helped to achieve a significant victory as the province announced they would continue to increase rates by 1%.



ACORN members also rallied in solidarity with other groups around the rising cost of food for social assistance recipients, as well as spearheading actions and a petition to “stop the income clawback” and stop the cuts to the Community Start Up and Maintenance benefit. In October, members launched a social media campaign including [YouTube testimonials](#) intended to reach a broader base of people regarding the Social Assistance campaign.

## Free Income Tax Sites and Financial Literacy

As always, offices of ACORN Canada continued to run our FITS (Free Income Tax Sites) project; not simply a tax preparation program, but a strategy to create a storefront and a community presence for ACORN's economic justice efforts. ACORN runs free tax preparation clinics that are open at times convenient for working people. We prepare taxes for low and moderate income families and link them with unrealized benefits such as the GST credit.

The Ottawa office, in partnership with Desjardins Caisse populaire Rideau d'Ottawa and City of Ottawa, did close to 1,000 taxes. This new partnership with Desjardins allowed Ottawa ACORN to expand its financial literacy programs and look towards positive changes in the FITS program in the coming year.

In BC, thanks to a partnership with Vancity Credit Union, our FITS program continued to expand, with close to 3,000 returns completed for low and moderate income families – and over \$4 million going back to our members' communities.