

ACORN CANADA—2013

2013 YEAR END REPORT

Executive Summary

In 2013 ACORN Canada engaged 745 new full members and 6,075 members in total. To date we have over 59,000 members in 20+ neighbourhood chapters in 8 cities across Canada: New Westminster, Burnaby, Surrey, Ottawa, Gatineau, Toronto, Coquitlam and Halifax.

Across the country we held 265 events turning out 3,274 people. That's five events every week! We focused on building community leaders and strengthening community capacity to fight for change. We also held our second national convention turning out 150 members from across the country!

ACORN members come together to improve our communities, by tackling pressing concerns in our neighborhoods, cities and the country. Members choose what issues to address—from traffic problems to nationwide concerns such as increasing affordable homeownership and raising the minimum wage. They take action to get decision-makers to make real changes.



Convention 2013—Toronto, Ontario

In 2013 ACORN Canada held our second National Convention, this year in Toronto at Ryerson University. 150 members from across the country joined with Toronto members for three days of workshops, actions, and leadership development. Members went doorknocking

in low income neighbourhoods in Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne's riding, to collect almost 1,000 signatures on our petition to raise the minimum wage. Members also attended and led workshops throughout the convention, focused on developing

leadership skills and building power. Members concluded the convention with an action on Bell Canada to demand a meeting with the CEO George Cope, to discuss Bell creating a \$10/month high speed internet product for low income families - to help end the digital divide!



1. Campaign Highlight — Digital Access to Opportunities

In 2013 ACORN Canada launched our new national campaign, Digital Access to Opportunities. This campaign is focused on closing the “digital divide” to ensure that all families have an opportunity to access the digital world from home.

On October 31 we released our Horror Report – a ranking of telecommunications companies based on survey data collected from respondents across Canada. The release was accompanied by a National Day of Action to demand telecommunications companies provide low income

families with \$10/month high speed internet and subsidized computers; members held actions – in Halloween masks and costumes – in Burnaby, Ottawa, Gatineau, Toronto and Halifax.

After Rogers created an extremely slow \$10/month product specifically for Toronto Community Housing tenants, ACORN members rallied at Rogers headquarters in Toronto in December to demand better.

Meanwhile in BC, members have been very active on this campaign. BC ACORN held an action outside Telus headquarters in Burnaby in November. And in December BC & Ottawa held

actions at federal Minister of Industry James Moore’s offices—demanding a meeting with the federal government to discuss their role in regulating internet costs for low income families.



2. Campaign Highlight — Healthy Homes



In September, Ottawa ACORN won a municipal by-law that ensures landlords maintain appliances provided for tenants (such as stoves, refrigerators, etc.). Over 50 ACORN members filled the committee chambers, and several leaders spoke to City Council about the issue.

Ottawa ACORN’s Housing Justice Program moved ahead this year, continuing to win abatements for

low-income families. The total repairs and abatements now stand at \$220,000.

In Halifax, NS members launched a provincial campaign asking for reinstatement of rent control, holding a town hall and encouraging tenants to make it an election issue in the fall.

BC ACORN’s provincial Healthy Homes campaign continued with many actions against problem landlords in

Surrey, Burnaby and Vancouver. Members lobbied the Residential Tenancy Board for stiffer penalties on slumlords who fail to deal with tenants’ concerns over cockroaches, broken elevators, mold and other problems.

In Toronto, member strategized about the next phase of their municipal landlord licensing campaign.

3. Campaign Highlight — Fair Wages

Ontario ACORN members have been fighting in to raise the minimum wage to \$14/hour, indexed to inflation. Members in Toronto and Ottawa have held monthly actions calling on Premier Kathleen Wynne to take action on this issue.

In Toronto and Ottawa, the campaign launched in March with an action outside the Ministry of Labour. Over 300 members and allies attended. In August, 35+ members held an action in front of MPP

Madeline Meilleur’s office, banging pots and pans and drawing supportive honks from passing cars. For Thanksgiving, 40+ members showed up outside MPP John Fraser’s office to distribute macaroni and cheese; and in Toronto members went to Premier Wynne’s office to deliver a thanksgiving turkey burger— both symbolic of the Thanksgiving meal most low wage workers can afford.

December, Ottawa ACORN members held a Minimum Wage forum, attracting over 80

people to ask political candidates about their positions on the issue. Leaders from both cities made a compelling presentation to the Minimum Wage Panel urging them to act now.



4. Campaign Highlight—Remittance Justice

Our Remittance Justice campaign was launched in 2012 to demand regulation of fees charged by banks and money transfer organizations for sending money overseas—ACORN members want to see fees capped at 5%.

2013 saw the reintroduction of our remittance bill, Bill 98, at Queen’s Park

by Ontario MPP Jagmeet Singh and ACORN leaders, in April. The bill would cap remittance fees and make the industry more transparent, so that customers know exactly how much they are paying to send money to family and friends overseas.



5. Campaign Highlight — Disability Rights



In Ottawa, members were extremely active on the disability rights campaigns this year. Central to their efforts was the “Stop the Income Clawback” campaign, demanding the province stop clawing back disability benefits. Members held four actions on local MPPs during the winter and were successful in securing an increase in the limit to \$200.

In BC, the member-created Disability Rights Group was also very active, lobbying the provincial government for a

raise in the disability rates in general, and an increase in assistance rates for single parents with disabilities in particular. Over 25 members held an action at the Burnaby Social assistance office in July to voice these demands.



6. Free Income Tax Sites

This year the Toronto, Ottawa and BC offices of ACORN Canada continued to run the 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 Canada runs free tax preparation centers that are open at times conven-

ient for working people. We prepare taxes for low and moderate income families and link them with unrealized benefits such as the GST credit.

In 2013 our New Westminster office in Metro Vancouver led the way doing 3,118 tax returns, returning a whopping \$4.3 million into communities across the lower mainland of BC.

Toronto filed over 650 tax returns, contributing \$800,000 into our communities.

Ottawa ACORN did over 800 returns, getting \$1 million back into the community.

Since 2007, ACORN Canada has filed 17,469 tax returns from across the country, returning over \$24 million to the neighbourhoods we work in

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ACORN Canada is a membership based organization for low and moderate income families. Our central purpose is to effectively represent and champion the interests of Canada's low and moderate income urban citizens on the critical issues of social and economic justice.



ACORN Canada Making News

- CTV Ottawa:** [Minimum Wage](#)
- Cantech Letter:** [Why Canada should subsidize \\$10 a month internet for low income families](#)
- The Province:** [Poverty activists demand \\$10-a-month Internet access](#)
- Ottawa Sun:** [Minimum wage not enough, panel told](#)
- Ottawa Citizen:** [Business, labour, activists air their views on minimum wage](#)
- CFRA 580:** [Minimum wage public consultation held in Ottawa](#)
- CKNW:** [Interview with BC ACORN member Rachel Goodine](#)
- L'Express:** [Des prix favorables demandés pour Internet](#)
- Halifax Media Co-Op:** [Bridging the digital divide](#)
- News 95.7:** [ACORN members push to make internet more accessible](#)
- News 95.7:** [Nova Scotia's Horror Report Action](#)
- Burnaby News Leader:** [ACORN protests for cheaper Internet access](#)
- Digital Journal:** [ACORN Demands Affordable Access to the Digital World at Burnaby Action: New Halloween HORROR Report Exposes Ghoulish Cell and Internet Companies](#)
- The Now News Tri-City:** [Protest focuses on child support payments](#)
- NEWS 1130:** [ACORN BC wants \\$10-a-month Internet for low-income homes](#)
- Vancouver 24hours:** [BC ACORN calls for \\$10-per-month Internet](#)
- Perspectives Vanier:** [ACORN Would Like Minimum Wage to Increase](#)
- CBC News:** [East Ottawa tenants complain of roaches](#)
- CFRA 580:** [ACORN Ottawa demanding better maintenance of Russell Road apartment building](#)
- Huffington Post:** [Ontario group calls for minimum wage to be raised to \\$14 an hour from \\$10.25](#)
- The Province:** [Vancouver poised to take building owners to court](#)
- CFRA 580:** [ACORN to protest local MPP over minimum wage](#)
- News:** [Mac and cheese protest outside Ottawa MPP's office](#)
- Toronto Star:** [Ontario minimum wage workers on the rise, study finds](#)
- Metro News:** [Vancouver seeks legal action against problem landlord](#)
- Halifax Media Co-Op:** [Tenants' rights group calls for rent control](#)
- News 91.9:** [Group wants rent control to become election issue](#)
- CBC Maritime Noon:** [Rent Control](#)
- Metro News Halifax:** [Tenants group calls for return to rent control, wants it to become election issue](#)
- CityNews Toronto:** [Workers call for \\$14 minimum wage at province-wide rallies, September](#)
- NOW:** [Workers demand \\$14 minimum wage](#)
- CBC News:** [Toronto protesters call for higher minimum wage](#)
- Ottawa Citizen:** [Wrestling with the minimum wage](#)
- Surrey Now:** [Disability rate for single parents 'not enough to live on,' protesters say](#)
- Global BC:** [Tenants rally at problem building](#)
- 24hrs Vancouver:** [City of Vancouver to take action on illegal apartment](#)
- Metro News Vancouver:** [Furious tenants rally outside problem apartments](#)
- The Province:** [Fed-up tenants plan rally to air complaints](#)
- CBC Ottawa Morning:** [They say \\$10.25 an hour is not enough](#)
- NOW Magazine:** [Bad Week for Bell Canada](#)
- Burnaby Now:** [Acorn Canada launches Burnaby chapter](#)

