

# ACORN CANADA 2016 REPORT



## Executive Summary

In 2016 ACORN Canada engaged 802 new full members, and 17,024 new members in total.

ACORN Canada now comprises 102,522 members across Canada, in 20+ neighbourhood chapters in ten cities: New Westminster, Burnaby, Surrey, Coquitlam, Ottawa, Toronto, Gatineau, Montreal, Halifax and Dartmouth.

Nationally, we held 442 events, turning out 5,310 people – an average of over eight events every week – including leadership workshops, chapter meetings, public forums and actions.

In early April, 25 ACORN members from across the country travelled to Ottawa for our National Leadership School, which focuses on developing advanced leadership skills in campaign development and building capacity. These leaders were able to share experiences and feedback from the wide variety of regions and backgrounds they represented, strengthening the organization's cohesiveness on a national level.

2016 was a great year for ACORN Canada's growth as an organization, with expansion projects in Winnipeg and Calgary, and lots of movement in our Gatineau chapter. ACORN members were everywhere this year, giving testimonials to the CRTC hearings on internet as a basic service, winning a huge victory on Landlord Licensing in Toronto, and standing up for fair wages, affordable transit, healthy homes, and an end to predatory lending. We made many big strides this year and we're sure to keep fighting in 2017 and beyond!

ACORN Canada is an independent national organization of low- and moderate-income families. We believe that social and economic justice can best be achieved with a national active membership who are invested in their organization and focused on building power for change!



### 2016 Highlights & Victories

#### ACORN Canada – National

- Release of our National report on Internet for All gained a lot of media attention and won us 10 delegates to the CRTC hearing.

#### BC ACORN

- Maximum interest rate for payday lenders dropped from 23% to 17%
- Rent bank established in October thanks to members and partner organizations
- Introduction of Telus \$10/month pilot project for high speed internet

#### Nova Scotia ACORN

- Halifax City Council passed a motion to start consultations on the possibility of landlord licensing
- Members created a municipal platform in the HRM

#### Ontario ACORN

- Legislation passed allowing cities to use inclusionary zoning as a means to build affordable housing
- Maximum interest charged on a payday loan lowered from 21% to 18%
- Forced thousands of dollars invested by private landlords in market rent housing

#### Toronto ACORN

- Landlord Licensing passed by City Council
- Minimum separation distance report motion passed unanimously

#### Ottawa ACORN

- Herongate rent increase reduced from 5% to 3%
- Commitment from the City to license payday lenders and zone distances
- Won a \$57 low income transit pass with partners
- Largest turnout ever at a fundraiser with the first annual Trivial Beersuit

## Fair Banking

In 2016, ACORN Canada held several National Days of Action on Fair Banking, with actions across the country targeting predatory lenders GoEasy/Easy Financial and their investor companies. In September, the action was followed by the release of ACORN's report on Predatory Lending based on a survey of high interest financial services users.

In Toronto, the local campaign for minimum separation distance bylaws was successful – the motion for City staff to report back on MSD passed unanimously through City Council. Recent Ontario legislation gives powers to municipalities to implement MSD bylaws, so members in Toronto and Ottawa are fighting for this moving forward.

The Ontario government has also committed to lowering the maximum interest rate for a payday loan from 21% to 18% as of January 1, 2017.

In Ottawa, members took action in a local capacity, with rallies, meetings, actions, and press conferences, generating press about the campaign and engaging allies. In May, ACORN members held a joint rally and march for postal banking with CUPW, turning out hundreds of people across the country..

In BC, the launch of a provincial Fair Fees / Stop Predatory lending campaign with actions in the Spring resulted in an August meeting with high ranking ministry officials who were in the midst of a review of the current laws. In September the Liberal government announced they were dropping the maximum interest rate for payday lenders from 23% to 17%.

## Healthy Homes

Toronto ACORN members celebrated a huge victory late in 2016 – City Council finally voted to move forward on Landlord Licensing. After a decade of hard work by ACORN leaders (such as ACORN Canada President Marva Burnett), Toronto now has the most robust enforcement protocol in North America.

BC ACORN members have been very active on housing campaigns in 2016. In Surrey, members have been pushing for a stronger standard of maintenance by-law, better enforcement, and inclusionary zoning. In Burnaby, members made a lot of noise on the demovictions campaign, securing a meeting with the Mayor late in the year.

Ottawa ACORN held their first Tenant Summit in July, bringing out almost 100 members along with guest speakers and allies. Between June and November, ACORN members met one-on-one with over half of Ottawa City Council to discuss Landlord Licensing.

Late in the year, Ontario ACORN members shared in the victory of the province granting powers to the cities to enact Inclusionary Zoning laws, which ACORN has been pushing since 2008.

In Halifax, ACORN members won a key motion at City Hall in October to develop a consultation process on landlord licensing. Members will continue to push forward and keep the pressure on city councilors to make sure low income tenants are the primary stakeholders consulted in this process!

Nationally, ACORN has been pushing forward in the fight for Right to Housing, with lobby visits on a National Housing Strategy that will work for low and moderate income Canadians.



## Internet for All

ACORN Canada released our report *Internet for All: Internet Use and Accessibility for Low-Income Canadians in Toronto* in January. In April, ACORN members attended the CRTC hearings on the cost of telecommunications. Ottawa members attended in person, while members from remote offices were teleconferenced in to give testimonials on the impact of high priced internet on the everyday lives of low income families.

In December, the CRTC reached its decision, announcing that high-speed internet is a basic service and committing to bringing access to remote regions. However, with no commitment to subsidize low income people's access to internet services, the problem of affordability has not been addressed – so ACORN members are still fighting for Internet for All!

In BC, members had success on this campaign provincially, with Telus introducing a \$10/month pilot project for single parents receiving welfare or PWD assistance.



## Social Assistance & Disability Rights

Ottawa and Gatineau members held monthly actions on the campaign to raise asset limits and stop the income clawbacks for ODSP and OW recipients. Members gathered over 1,000 signatures on a petition for this campaign.

BC ACORN members re-launched the PWD campaign in February, following a disappointing provincial budget and the removal of the transit pass subsidy. Members held several high turnout actions and developed a strong partnership with allies including Raise the Rates.

## Fair Wages

ACORN members in Ontario, Gatineau, Metro Vancouver, and Halifax continued to participate in the campaign for a \$15 minimum wage, with actions and petitioning campaigns throughout 2016.

## Community Safety

The fentanyl crisis hit the Metro Vancouver community particularly hard in 2016, and Surrey ACORN members have responded by campaigning for supervised injection sites. This is a newly launched campaign that will hopefully bring positive change in 2017.

ACORN members in Gatineau held a Community Safety Forum in March around racial profiling, which was attended by the community policing department and city social services staff.

## Energy is Essential

Members in Ottawa and Toronto launched a new campaign to fight for increasing OESP qualifications, making automatic enrollment, increasing LEAP qualifications and getting hydro costs under control. The Ontario ACORN membership is energized by this new campaign!



## Free Income Tax Sites & Benefit Centres

ACORN Canada's Income Tax Sites and Benefits Clinics continue to successfully boost financial literacy in low income communities, drawing thousands of people into ACORN offices in Ontario and British Columbia each year. In addition to tax preparation, the program connects low and moderate income families with unrealized benefits. This year we were also able to connect 263 families to the Ontario Electricity Support Program, saving them \$30-\$50 off their hydro and electricity bills each month. We also registered over 250 children from low income families across the country for the Canada Learning Bond, ensuring up to \$2,000 per child was deposited in an RESP for their post-secondary education.

**In 2016, ACORN offices filed 1,464 tax returns in our Ottawa site, and 3,640 tax returns in our Metro Vancouver site.**

**Since 2007, our tax sites have filed over 34,000 tax returns across the country, returning over \$46 million back into our neighbourhoods!**



## ACORN Leaders in the Press

ACORN Canada was in the press over 250 times in 2016 – here are some highlights:

### Toronto ACORN

**CBC News: Toronto considers affordable internet after release of ACORN report**  
**Toronto Star: Toronto bylaw limiting payday lenders gets a push from ACORN, councillors**

**Toronto Star: Three paths to more mixed-income neighbourhoods**  
**CBC News Toronto: Toronto ACORN pushes for landlord licensing**  
**Toronto Star: Tenant protection bylaw hailed as 'groundbreaking'**

### Ottawa ACORN

**Ottawa Citizen: Treat payday lenders like strip clubs, and gradually force them out, anti-poverty group says**  
**CBC News Ottawa: ACORN members fight rent increase in Herongate**  
**Orleans Star: ACORN calling for change in welfare, disability program**  
**ICI Radio-Canada: Des citoyens relancent le débat d'épicerie sur l'Île-de-Hull**  
**CBC News Ottawa: ACORN members fight for low income transit pass**

### BC ACORN

**Breakfast Television: BC ACORN members take a stand against demo-victions**  
**The Province: B.C. low-income rights group urges stricter regulations on payday loans**  
**The Now: FOCUS: Nowhere to Rent — A Surrey perspective**  
**Burnaby Now: Fight for \$15 campaign comes to Burnaby**  
**Globe & Mail: Groups call for Surrey, B.C., to open supervised-injection sites**

### Nova Scotia ACORN

**Global News: Affordable housing need in Halifax**  
**The Signal: ACORN N.S. protest cuts to transport, special diets from Community Services**  
**The Coast: A game of cat and mouse for public housing tenants**  
**News 95.7: Nova Scotia ACORN fights for Landlord Licensing**  
**CBC News: Tenants at Sunrise Manor fed up with bedbugs and cockroaches**

### ACORN Canada

**ICI Radio-Canada: Comment rendre Internet abordable à toutes les bourses?**  
**Rabble.ca: Scraping by on the minimum wage and the Fight for \$15**  
**Toronto Star: How the federal budget affects everyday Canadian families**  
**Huffington Post: Rogers Offers Cheaper Internet For Low-Income Households**  
**CBC The National: Is affordable internet a 'human right'?**  
**Toronto Star: Google to ban payday loan ads**  
**CBC News: When money trumps 'education' for payday loan users**  
**The Globe & Mail: CRTC rules high-speed Internet a basic service, sets targets**

CONTACT ACORN CANADA

ACORN Canada (National Office) – 416-461-5322 – [canadaacorn@acorncanada.org](mailto:canadaacorn@acorncanada.org)  
Toronto ACORN – 416-461-9233 – [toronto@acorncanada.org](mailto:toronto@acorncanada.org)  
Ottawa & Gatineau ACORN – 613-746-5999 – [onacornot@acorncanada.org](mailto:onacornot@acorncanada.org)  
BC ACORN – 604-522-8706 – [bcacorn@acorncanada.org](mailto:bcacorn@acorncanada.org)  
Nova Scotia ACORN – 902 220 3671 - [halifax@acorncanada.org](mailto:halifax@acorncanada.org)

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