



ACORN CANADA YEAR END REPORT

2017

UNITING COMMUNITIES FOR JUSTICE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

507

FULL NEW MEMBERS IN 2017 AND 11,000 NEW MEMBERS IN TOTAL

INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF MEMBERS SINCE LAST YEAR

11.3%

113,523

TOTAL NUMBER OF MEMBERS ACROSS CANADA

NATIONALLY, WE HELD 342 EVENTS TURNING OUT 4,809 PEOPLE

An average of over six events every week – including leadership workshops, chapter meetings, public forums and actions.

2017 NATIONAL CONVENTION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

265 ACORN members from across the country gathered to prove without a doubt their commitment to uniting for justice.

HUGE GROWTH

Organizers newly on the ground in Montreal, Halifax, Hamilton and Peel in 2017 plus remote outreach for potential future organizing in Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan!

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!

20+ NEIGHBOURHOOD CHAPTERS ACROSS THIRTEEN CITIES

- NEW WESTMINSTER
- BURNABY
- SURREY
- COQUITLAM
- OTTAWA
- TORONTO
- HAMILTON
- BRAMPTON
- MISSISSAUGA
- MONTREAL
- GATINEAU
- HALIFAX
- DARTMOUTH

Contents

- Campaigns 2
 - Fair Banking 2
 - Healthy Homes 3
 - Social Assistance & Disability Rights 4
 - Energy is Essential 4
 - Childcare..... 5
 - Transit 5
- Convention..... 6
- Free Income Tax Sites & Benefit Centres..... 7
- ACORN Leaders in the Press..... 7
 - Toronto ACORN 7
 - Ottawa ACORN 8
 - Ontario ACORN 8
 - BC ACORN..... 8
 - Nova Scotia ACORN 9
 - Hamilton ACORN 9
 - Peel ACORN 9
 - ACORN Canada 9
- 2017 Highlights & Victories..... 10
 - ACORN Canada – National 10
 - BC ACORN..... 10
 - Toronto ACORN 10
 - Peel ACORN 10
 - Hamilton ACORN 10
 - Ottawa ACORN 10
 - Nova Scotia ACORN 10
 - Ontario ACORN..... 11

Campaigns

Fair Banking



ACORN members were very active on Fair Banking in 2017, particularly on the “End Predatory Lending” campaign. Nationally, our efforts culminated in a National Day of Action to End Predatory Lending on November 30th, with participation from ACORN members across the country (in ten cities!) including New Westminster, Calgary, Regina, Toronto, Peel, Hamilton, Ottawa, Montreal, and Halifax! This attracted a lot of press – including a write-up in the Toronto Star – and resulted in meetings with MPs in

Montreal, Peel, and Ottawa. In New Westminster, the MP came out to the event and spoke in favour of the campaign.

Our victories included lowering the maximum interest rate for payday lenders in Ontario and BC. We continue to fight to extend the payback period for alternative lending products; creating a real-time database to track payday loans; and tightening regulations on emerging alternative lending products – among others.

In Ottawa, members held a banking forum in February; NSF fees were identified as the number one issue. All of our local offices ran fair banking and predatory lending actions throughout the year, delivering letters to major banks (and winning a meeting with BMO in Ottawa), payday lenders, and government leaders. In Ontario, the campaign resulted in Bill 59 – the Putting Consumers First Act, which includes the reduction of the interest rate to \$15 on \$100 (an estimated \$6.5 million in savings); extended repayment; and enabling minimum distancing.



Healthy Homes

Tenant rights and healthy homes continues to be one of our biggest issues across our ACORN offices, both on local and regional levels. In British Columbia, members fought to strengthen the provincial rent control laws with actions in March and August, and succeeded in closing the fixed-term rent control loophole.



Metro Vancouver's housing

affordability crisis was the key focus of BC ACORN's healthy homes campaign in 2017, including demands for the government to commit to exploring alternative maximum rent increases and reviewing the Residential Tenancy Act to ensure tenants have a seat at the table.

BC ACORN members created a community engagement survey tool, which they distributed to community members to explore the condition of rental properties in Metro Vancouver. The report was released in April 2017.

Rent control is also a key campaign issue in Ontario; in April, the government ended the exemption where buildings constructed after 1991 had no rent control laws. The Minister of Housing came to the 2017 ACORN Convention to talk about the changes to the rent control laws in Ontario, including reviewing the regulations that govern above the guideline rent increases.



Ottawa ACORN members voted landlord licensing the top priority for 2017, holding a tenant survey press conference (with 13 news outlets in attendance) and Tenant Day of Action at City Hall.

Hamilton members are also pushing hard for landlord licensing, winning significant repairs in two buildings, and holding a Hamilton Tenant Rally in July – turning out 75 people. The rally included three City Council allies as well as other local allied organizations, all speaking out in support of landlord licensing.

In Peel, during the Cooksville organizing drive, members in a high-rise owned by Northview Apartment REIT formed a Tenants Union, recognized by the landlord.

Toronto ACORN's hard-won landlord licensing campaign has achieved a robust municipal enforcement program in the city. Landlords are charged \$13 per unit and proactive inspections are happening in Toronto's over 3,500 apartment buildings.

Social Assistance & Disability Rights

Disability rights were the focus of BC ACORN actions in 2017, including a disability rights forum in February. Demands include increasing PWD rates to \$1,800/month and welfare rates to \$1,500/month.

In Ottawa, members held social assistance/disability rights actions throughout the year, succeeding in increasing asset limits in Ontario.



Energy is Essential



ACORN's Energy is Essential campaign was a co-ordinated effort to end Energy Poverty in Ontario. Through actions, Ontario ACORN was able to become a stakeholder, meeting with the CEO of the Ontario Energy Board and helping secure victories, including a 40% increase to the Ontario Energy Support Payment (OESP); increasing the income threshold of the OESP and the Low Income Energy Payment; forcing the OEB to make getting on the program less burdensome; and a review of the service fees that energy companies can charge.

Childcare

In Ontario, ACORN members in Ottawa, Toronto and Peel participated in a new organizing drive around a campaign calling for affordable and accessible childcare. The key plank of the platform is \$10/day childcare, modeled off of the system in Quebec. The campaign was launched in October, and to date has made the front page of the Toronto Star, and resulted in ACORN leaders meeting with the Minister of Early Years and Childhood Development.



Transit

In 2017 we ran transit campaigns in Peel and Ottawa. In Peel, a new Light Rail Train being built drives through the middle of the chapter and will lead to massive developments that put low-to-moderate housing at risk, while privatizing transit services in the city. The first campaign undertaken by Peel ACORN was to push the City of Mississauga and Region of Peel to make permanent, and improve, the affordable bus pass for low-income riders – and we won! MiWay (Mississauga's transit system) now offers a permanent 50% discount to low-income riders and regional council has cleared the way for a similar program in Brampton.



In Ottawa, we won the Equipass along with allies. A discounted single fare option and free Presto passes for Equipass/Equipare recipients was announced for the 2018 budget and came into effect in April.

Convention



In June 2017, ACORN Canada held our fourth National Convention, this time in Ottawa. Over 265 ACORN members from across the country came together to share victories, plan next steps, and run workshops on our campaigns.

Members led and participated in many diverse campaign workshops: Affordable &

Livable Housing, Pay Equity/Childcare, Disability Rights and Social Assistance, Social Media and Action, Fair Banking/Internet for All, and more! The next day members took to the streets to go door-knocking in low and moderate income Ottawa neighbourhoods, building interest in ACORN campaigns. Despite rain and humid weather, the energy was high all weekend and ACORN members showed they work hard!

This year our convention culminated in a huge action on two of our big national campaigns – Fair Banking and Internet for All. Members led an impromptu sit-in at the Ministry of Finance, demanding that the Minister force the banks to lower NSF fees and stop pushing people into predatory and fringe lending. Shortly before the event, the Ministry of Innovation agreed to set up a meeting with ACORN leaders on our Internet for All campaign; during the action, members marched by the Ministry as a reminder to keep that promise!

We were joined at the Convention by many inspiring guests, including Ontario NDP leader Andrea Horwath; Canadian Labour Congress President Hassan Yussuff; Max FineDay of Canadian Roots Exchange; Federal NDP MP Niki Ashton; Canadian Union of Postal Workers National President Mike Palecek; Ontario Minister of Housing Chris Ballard; Deputy Mayor of Ottawa Mark Taylor; CUPE Local 79 President Tim Maguire; Ottawa City Councillor Catherine McKenney; OPSEU Board Region 4 President Chris Tremblay; and Ottawa & District Labour Council President Sean McKenny.

Many thanks to our union sponsors: Canadian Labour Congress, Canadian Teachers' Federation, CUPE National, CUPE Local 79, CUPW National, ETFO, NUPGE, OPSEU, Public Service Alliance of Canada, Unifor National, and United Steelworkers.

As always, it was the ACORN leaders and members who made this convention possible, with their amazing energy and hard work.

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 141 families to the Ontario Electricity Support Program, saving them \$45-\$75 off their hydro and electricity bills each month. We also registered over 400 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 Ottawa, we received a grant from the City of Ottawa to do tax and bookkeeping training for precariously employed individuals. Through this program we trained 201 entrepreneurs, contractors, freelancers and small business owners through 10 workshops and one-on-one phone sessions.

In 2017, ACORN offices filed 1,332 tax returns in our Ottawa site, and 2,061 tax returns in our Metro Vancouver site. Since 2007, our tax sites have filed over 34,000 tax returns across the country, returning over \$50 million back into our neighbourhoods!

ACORN Leaders in the Press

ACORN Canada was in the press over 200 times in 2017 – here are some highlights:

Toronto ACORN

[CBC News: City of Toronto approves new apartment bylaws to protect tenants](#)

[Inside Toronto: ACORN, residents fight against Toronto Community Housing closures](#)

[Motherboard: Google Wants to Build the 'City of the Future' in Toronto, and Locals Are Worried](#)

[Toronto Star: Ontario urged to make ending child poverty an election issue](#)



[Inside Toronto: New rules may hurt Toronto payday lenders, but won't end need for cash](#)

Ottawa ACORN

[CBC Ottawa Morning: Landlord Licensing](#)

[Centretown Buzz: Citywide survey reveals big problems in low-income housing](#)

[Ottawa Community News: Residents push for better Orléans transit service](#)

[Metro News: Overbrook residents demand infrastructure improvements](#)

[Metro News Ottawa: City plans to control payday lending industry](#)



Ontario ACORN

[The Oshawa Express: Advocates call for landlord licensing](#)

[The Globe & Mail: Cheers, criticism greet Ontario plan to raise minimum wage to \\$15](#)



BC ACORN

[Revelstoke Review: New B.C. regulations on payday loans don't address real issues: advocates](#)

[The Tyee: Disability Rates Far Too Low for 'Dignified Standard of Living,' Report Finds](#)

[News 1130: Affordability linked to rising homeless numbers: report](#)

[Surrey Now-Leader: 'Shame on the mayor' was a message from Clayton suite protest in Surrey](#)

Nova Scotia ACORN

[CBC News: The struggle of living without home internet](#)

[CBC News Nova Scotia: Interest-free loans to first-time home buyers 'step in the right direction'](#)

[CBC News: Would landlord licences improve housing standards in Halifax?](#)

[Chronicle Herald: Initiatives encourage landlord licensing](#)

[Metro News: New survey suggests Nova Scotians growing frustrated with landlords, rental units](#)

Hamilton ACORN

[CHCH: Tenants forced to sleep in tents because of unsafe living conditions](#)

[Global News: Tenants rally for licensing of large apartment buildings in Hamilton](#)



Peel ACORN

[Mississauga.com: MiWay extends affordable transportation pilot program](#)

[Mississauga.com: Mississauga tenants living in grimy apartment complex fight rent hike](#)



ACORN Canada

[The Globe & Mail: Innovation Minister Navdeep Bains takes aim at wireless affordability](#)

[CBC News: ACORN protesters occupy the Finance building lobby](#)

[The Strand: #Internetforall: Why Wifi is a Necessity, Not a Luxury](#)

[Toronto Star: Activists across Canada demand fair banking for low-income people](#)

2017 Highlights & Victories

ACORN Canada – National

- National Day of Action on Predatory Lending won us meetings with MPs in Ottawa, Peel and Montreal

BC ACORN

- Won a transportation supplement for PWD recipients
- Creation of a poverty reduction strategy
- Closed the fixed-term rent control loophole

Toronto ACORN

- Stopped garbage privatization as part of CUPE 416's "Kicked to the Curb" campaign
- Won Landlord Licensing in Toronto

Peel ACORN

- Expansion into Peel, including organizing drives in Cooksville and Malton
- Introduction of Affordable City Platform in Mississauga

Hamilton ACORN

- Landlord Licensing campaign was launched and has resulted in improvements to several apartment building in Downtown Hamilton

Ottawa ACORN

- Agenda for Change campaign launch in November
- We won the Equipass along with allies
- Successful fundraisers including Trivial Beersuit, ACORN Out Loud, Art in the Park, and Champions of Change ceremony – raising a combined total of over \$25,000

Nova Scotia ACORN

- Release of Provincial Tenants Survey and report

Ontario ACORN

- \$15/hour minimum wage with allies
- Helped lead the push to revamp Rent Control laws in Ontario and enabling Inclusionary Zoning Legislation.
- Won increase to OESP rates and expanded eligibility with allies
- Won lower interest rate with payday lenders, down to \$15 on \$100 in Ontario and \$17 on \$100 in BC.