

FOR COMMUNITY

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ACORN INSTITUTE CANADA

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FOR LEADERSHIP

**ACORN INSTITUTE CANADA  
YEAR END REPORT 2020**

## ABOUT AIC

ACORN Institute Canada (AIC) is a charitable organization that uses research and training to address the problems in low-income communities.

We believe that the poverty, discrimination, and community deterioration that exists in low-income communities is a result of a lack civic engagement, community leadership and financial literacy.

## OUR WORK IN 2020

The year 2020 was extraordinary in many ways. The pandemic affected every individual but disproportionately impacted low-to-moderate income tenants, low wage workers, racialized communities, single people, women and people on social assistance. Therefore, it became extremely significant for AIC to ensure that people who are most vulnerable have access to the resources they need to protect their rights.

Owing to the public health restrictions, we moved our operations online. However, we held many more meetings and workshops to meet the increasing demand for information in light of the rapidly changing policies and laws as the governments' response to the pandemic evolved.

### **Government support during COVID**

One of the first things that we started with at the start of the pandemic was a series of workshops and outreach to ensure that people have access to information about government support as it evolved during the pandemic nationally and provincially. We also made sure that people had access to local resources if they needed help.

### **Tenant Rights Workshops**

As the pandemic unfolded, it was very clear that low-to-moderate income tenants were adversely affected and needed urgent support. While most provinces and territories brought an eviction moratorium in the month of March, it lasted for a few months. With the second and the third wave of the pandemic which saw and continue to see the worst number of infections, none of the provinces brought back the kind of moratorium on evictions we saw at the start of the pandemic. This meant tens of thousands of tenants getting evicted or at risk of eviction as many of them lost their jobs or faced reduced hours of work. Moreover, with the hearings moving online, it became especially challenging for the most vulnerable tenants to have access to the much-needed support to retain their home. Another important issue that got exacerbated by the pandemic was lack of repair and maintenance as landlords stopped doing necessary repairs as soon

as the pandemic started. This deeply compromised the physical and mental well-being of tenants.

With support of our funders, AIC stepped in to fill this knowledge gap. We did tons of workshops to reach out to low-to-moderate income tenants across several cities including Hamilton, Halifax, London, Peel, Montreal, Ottawa, Vancouver and Toronto. The workshops have specifically focused on the following topics.

In addition, in each of these presentations, we direct tenants to resources they could access if they require legal assistance.

### **Evictions**

These workshops primarily focused on what tenants can do if they are facing eviction. As the pandemic rages, thousands of tenants are at risk of eviction or have gotten notices from their landlords owing to non-payment of rent. In addition, evictions due to other reasons such as renovations or demolitions also continue at a rapid pace. Having a home is the strongest public health measure during a pandemic. Hence, these workshops have been extremely important to ensure that tenants are aware of their rights if they are at risk of or are facing eviction.

### **Healthy Homes**

Every individual has a right to live in a healthy home. While many tenants were already living in substandard conditions, the situation got worse as landlords stopped undertaking necessary repairs taking advantage of the pandemic. Hence, it was important to create awareness among tenants on what is an essential and non-essential repair and maintenance during a pandemic and the rights of tenants during COVID.

### **Rent increases**

Several provinces came out with new laws relating to rent freeze. However, it was important to make sure that tenants understood the changes and were not exploited due to lack of awareness.

These workshops have become highly popular among tenants. Many tenants mentioned that they found them extremely helpful; some of them have been able to prevent an eviction and/or get repair and maintenance issues addressed by their landlord. AIC continues to hold them across Canada.

### **Closing Ottawa's digital divide**

We recently started this initiative, the purpose of which is to create a shared community vision of how to close Ottawa's digital divide by building a working group of low-income residents and organizations to identify issues, municipal solutions and opportunities for systemic change. We started with a citywide big virtual forum where we had 74 people including city councillors along and allies.

### **Policy research**

Throughout 2020, we conducted policy research on a number of issues, especially as the pandemic exacerbated the impact on the most vulnerable sections of the population. These included housing, internet and fair banking. We built our capacity further to strengthen research on the existing areas of work and also expanding our policy level work to newer areas that are critical from the lens of disadvantaged communities.

### **Leveraging community benefit agreements**

We are also exploring how low-to-moderate income people can best leverage the public infrastructure investments for the betterment of their communities.

## **OUR FUNDERS IN 2020**

We thank all our funders for their generous support.

Atkinson Foundation	\$220,000
BC Rehab Foundation	\$4,930
Community Foundations of Canada	\$110,000
Community Foundation of Mississauga	\$15,000
Hamilton Community Foundation	\$25,000 (2019) \$30,000 (2020)
Ottawa Community Foundation	\$12,000
Maytree Foundation	\$150,000
McConnell Foundation	\$25,000
Metcalf Foundation	\$20,000
Omega Foundation	\$20,000
Peter Gilgan Foundation	\$10,000
Vancouver Foundation	\$30,000