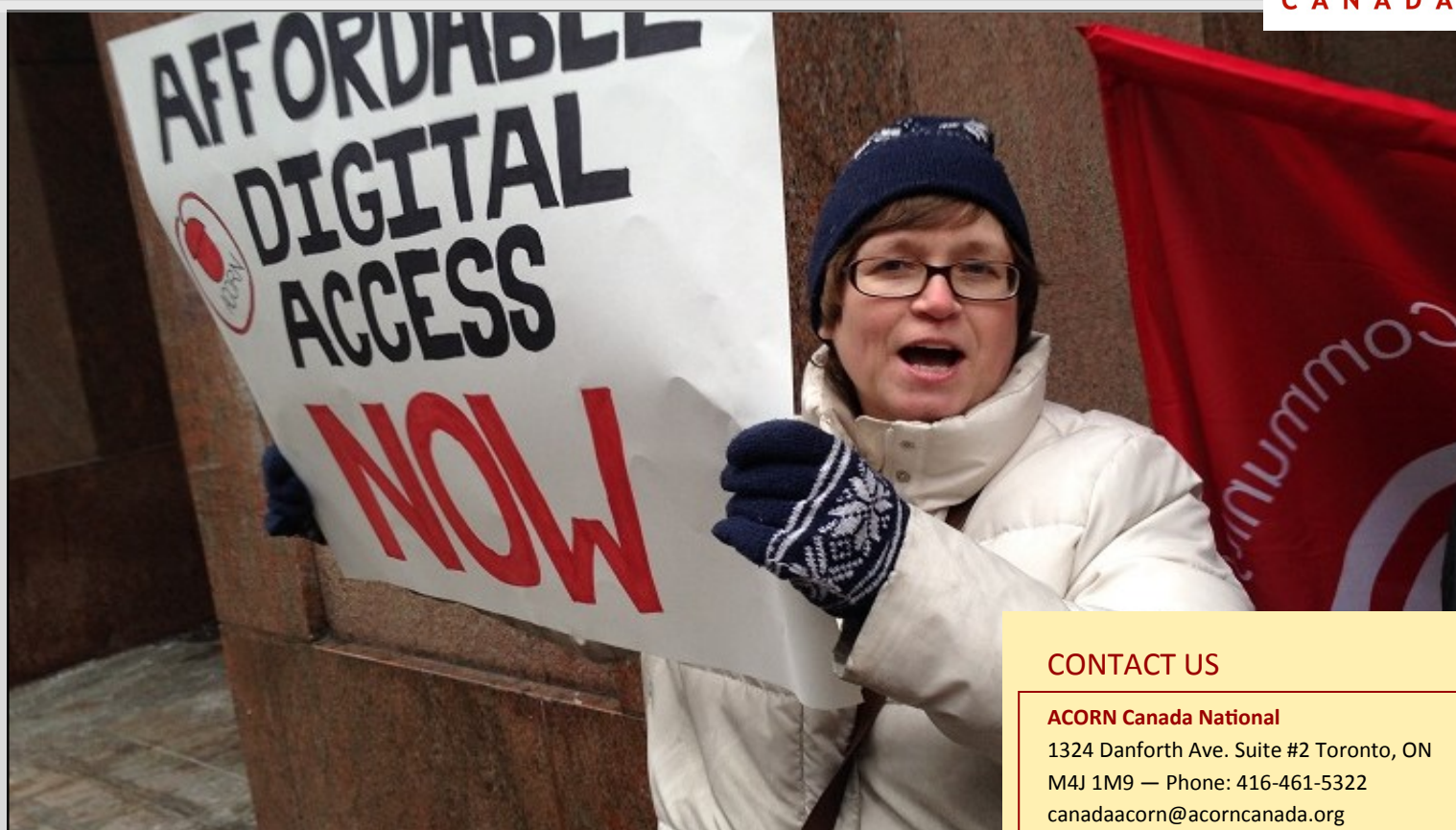


ACORN Canada

2014 Year End Report



Executive Summary

In 2014 ACORN Canada engaged 819 new full members, and 6,894 members in total. This year we celebrated our tenth anniversary of organizing in Canada, with 70,804 members in 20+ neighbourhood chapters in 9 cities across Canada: New Westminster, Burnaby, Surrey, Coquitlam, Ottawa, Gatineau, Toronto, Halifax and Dartmouth – and new organizing starting in Montreal!

Nationally, we held 356 events, turning out 4,391 people – an average of almost seven events every week – from chapter meetings to actions to leadership workshops. We focused on building up new chapters and strengthening existing ones, and ensuring neighbourhood leaders have the capacity to fight for change in our communities.

For ACORN members, every issue that affects our communities – from local tenant concerns to national access to affordable internet – can be a vehicle to build power; this year ACORN members continued to build capacity and take leadership roles in their communities to make real change.

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Digital Access to Opportunities

Our priority national campaign continues to be Digital Access to Opportunities, launched in 2013. This campaign is focused on closing the “digital divide” to ensure that all families have an opportunity to access the digital world from home – to look for jobs, do homework, and stay involved in the wider world. The campaign has numerous endorsements from various organizations, including school boards and unions.

ACORN members have had some encouraging gains on this campaign in 2014. We targeted both the federal government and the big telecommunications companies – Bell, Telus, Rogers, Eastlink, Videotron and Shaw. In August and November members in five cities held actions for the National Day(s) of Action to Close the Digital Divide. Rogers, Telus and Eastlink have now committed to develop products that work for low income families.



Predatory Lending

In February, ACORN members in Burnaby, BC made a presentation to City Council calling for a change in zoning that would stop lenders from clustering in poor neighbourhoods. A report from by-law will be brought back to council in 2015. In April, members from Newton chapter, BC also held an anti-payday lending rally where 4 payday lenders were clustered on one block. Shortly after this the City of Surrey passed a rezoning by-law to make sure that type of clustering no longer happens.

In Ontario, ACORN was a stakeholder in Ministry of Government and Consumer Services' policy review of the payday loan act this year - results come out in 2015. In the Toronto ACORN campaign for federal predatory lending regulations, leader Donna Borden - who was the victim of a predatory consolidation loan – was instrumental in launching and developing the campaign. We have a petition tabled at the House of Commons by the federal NDP demanding federal regulation of these predatory lenders.

Fair Wages

On June 1st, after a two year campaign by ACORN and allies, the Ontario government raised the minimum wage to \$11/hour. Late in 2014 the government then passed a bill to index the minimum wage to inflation.



Healthy Homes

In all cities we won countless repairs for ACORN members living in sub-standard housing.

Ottawa ACORN's Housing Justice Program continued connecting members with law students to help them bring housing complaints to the tribunal.

Toronto ACORN put a big push on the Healthy Homes campaign this year, collecting over 2,800 property standards complaints from 100+ buildings throughout the city. Members delivered the complaints to newly elected Mayor John Tory at City Hall in December.

Toronto members also won a number of local victories through actions and meetings with landlords in Jane and Finch, Don Mills, Chalkfarm and East York.

In BC, members in Tri-Cities, Burnaby and Surrey worked hard on affordable housing campaigns. ACORN's work on the campaign in Surrey forced candidates in the mayoral election to take a position on the issue; and in Burnaby members continued to fight for a Standards of Maintenance by-law.

In Nova Scotia, 2014 saw the launch of the Halifax Landlord Licensing campaign. Members were active on smaller campaigns as well, including a victory against the notorious Metlege landlords who in March were forced to pay for damages caused by a flood in one of their buildings – after being confronted by ACORN leaders!



Disability Rights

In BC, the Disability Rights Group actively, lobbying the provincial government for a raise in the disability rates in general, and to end the Liberal's policy of clawing back child support payments from single parent families who receive disability or income assistance.

BC ACORN members met with the Minister of Social Development twice, appeared on CBC Radio Vancouver to discuss the claw back issue, and held actions across the lower mainland, including a Mother's Day "Poverty Potluck" and a trip to the BC Legislature in Victoria. This campaign has forced the BC Liberals to review the policy.

National Leadership Development School in April

The national school brought 20 new leaders from across the country together in Ottawa, Ontario. Leaders from Halifax to Vancouver came together to build tools and skills for change, including community outreach, research, civic engagement and more.



Free Income Tax Sites

ACORN Canada's Free Income Tax Sites (FITS) program continues to draw thousands of low income people to ACORN offices. Not simply a tax preparation program, the initiative is a strategy to combine service provision with a storefront and community presence for ACORN's social and economic justice campaigns.

This year our Toronto, Ottawa, British Columbia and Nova Scotia ACORN offices participated in the program, preparing taxes at no charge for low and moderate income families and linking them with unrealized benefits such as the GST credit.

The Toronto office filed 511 free income tax returns this year; Ottawa did 1594; Nova Scotia did 50; and our BC office led the way with 2,978 returns in the New Westminster office, 289 returns in the new Vancouver tax office, and a further 341 returns through our mobile tax site.

Since 2007, the ACORN Canada FITS program has filed over 23,000 tax returns across the country, returning over \$31 million back into our neighbourhoods!



Press Highlights

ACORN Canada gained substantial media attention in 2014, with 185 press hits across the country—that's one every two days!

Here are some highlights:

Ottawa Citizen: [Life at a minimum: A look at the lives of three people on the bottom rung of the wage ladder](#)

CBC Nova Scotia: [Protesters demand tighter controls on Halifax landlords](#)

News1130: [Payday loan companies prey on the vulnerable: ACORN](#)

La Presse: [ACORN demande une réduction des coûts d'internet](#)

Ottawa Citizen: [Photos: ACORN protests for affordable internet](#)

The Province: ['Why should my son suffer?': Angry mothers sound off over B.C.'s child-support clawback](#)

Halifax Media Co-op: [Lively community meeting tackles landlord licensing and rent control](#)

Global News: [Low-income activists protest government clawbacks to child support in B.C.](#)

Chronicle Herald: [Low-income tenants demand Halifax license landlords](#)

Burnaby Now: [Anti-poverty group protests lack of Burnaby rentals](#)

Inside Toronto: [ACORN hosts Internet protest](#)

Cape Breton Post: [Fighting for the right to log on: Halifax protesters want \\$10 internet for low-income families](#)

CBC Metro Morning: [Digital Divide](#)

Toronto Star: [Breaking down the digital divide for lower-income families](#)

CTV News Atlantic: [Dartmouth tenants protest bedbug infestation](#)

Globe and Mail: ['Working for nothing': Canada joins global minimum wage debate](#)

The Now: [ACORN rallies in Surrey for affordable Internet rates](#)

CBC News: [Don Mills ACORN members demand healthy homes](#)



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