





ACORN INSTITUTE CANADA

ANNUAL REPORT

JAN-DEC 2025

WHAT IS AIC?

ACORN Institute Canada (AIC) is a charitable organization that uses research, education, and leadership development to address issues affecting low-and moderate-income communities. Our work helps residents understand their rights, access benefits and support, and develop the skills to participate in decisions affecting their homes and neighbourhoods.

People living on low incomes understand the challenges facing their communities, but often encounter barriers to having that knowledge recognized in public decisions. AIC creates opportunities for residents to build on their experience, learn about the institutions affecting their lives, and take on leadership roles. With support from community partners, we bring education into neighbourhood settings where participants can ask questions, practise new skills, and share what they learn with others.



THE SCOPE OF WORK IN 2025

In 2025, housing affordability, rental conditions, and household expenses shaped much of our work. Activities ranged from tenant rights workshops and national leadership training to the ongoing work of local meetings, community working groups, and individual assistance with support programs.

These regular activities are an important part of AIC's approach. A resident may first attend a meeting with a question about a repair or electricity bill. Through continued participation, they have opportunities to learn how the issue affects their neighbours, understand which institutions are responsible, and become more involved in community discussions. Leadership development takes place through this ongoing participation as well as through dedicated training from staff organizers.

During the year, our work included helping residents prepare to participate in municipal proceedings in Calgary, assisting eligible households with air-conditioning program registration in Ottawa and Toronto, providing Ontario Electricity Support Program assistance, and more. Community research documented the conditions tenants were experiencing and supplied material for further rights-based education.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT



AIC's leadership development model begins with the knowledge people bring from their own lives. Our work reaches communities that include racialized residents, seniors, students, people with disabilities, and others whose perspectives are often underrepresented in public decision-making. Programming responds to participants' experience and the issues they identify.

LEARNING THROUGH CHAPTER MEETINGS

Local chapter meetings provide a regular setting for community education and leadership development. Members chair meetings with coaching and preparation, gaining experience in guiding discussion and helping neighbours participate. For someone taking on this role for the first time, preparing for a meeting is itself a learning opportunity: considering what the group needs to discuss, how to explain an issue clearly, and how to make room for different perspectives.

Participants also learn by contributing to discussions, asking questions, and listening to neighbours describe similar problems. Meetings connect individual concerns with information about public institutions and available resources. Their content varies according to local priorities, allowing education to respond to what residents are experiencing.

The activities covered in this report focus on the educational and leadership-development components of these meetings. Regular opportunities to participate help newer members gain confidence, while experienced leaders develop their ability to support others.

LEADERSHIP SCHOOLS AND PEER TRAINING

Dedicated training gives participants time to develop these skills in greater depth. Ottawa's March National Leadership School brought together 22 community leaders from nine cities for two days of shared learning. Sessions covered facilitating large group meetings, national civics, media communication, and leadership, alongside an energy-poverty presentation and an introduction to ACORN Radio. Practical exercises allowed participants to apply their learning and exchange approaches with leaders from other communities.

Calgary's first Leadership School in November combined interview practice and short presentations with education about municipal responsibilities and participation in the budget process. These activities connected communication skills with opportunities to take part in local government.

A train-the-trainer approach supports learning beyond the initial session. Participants are encouraged to share their knowledge, help facilitate future discussions, and support neighbours who are beginning to take on leadership responsibilities.

COMMUNITY WORKING GROUPS

Community working groups provide an ongoing space for residents to examine concerns affecting a particular building, neighbourhood, or issue. While a workshop can introduce a topic, working groups allow participants to return to questions over time, share new information, and develop a more detailed understanding of the problems they face.

These groups bring together residents' firsthand experience and information about the institutions responsible for housing and community services. Participants can compare experiences, identify common questions, and consider where further research or education is needed. The format also creates opportunities to practise facilitating discussions and explaining information to others.

CONNECTING LOCAL EXPERIENCE WITH SHARED LEARNING

At Waterloo Region's January town hall, residents discussed rent increases, renovictions, food costs, repairs, and pests in small groups. Hamilton tenants shared their experience of local renoviction protections, and participants took part in a practical group exercise. The gathering introduced a tenant survey that later informed research into housing conditions in the region.

Online meetings extended opportunities for peer learning to residents outside communities with a local ACORN office. A Remote Ontario introductory workshop in December reached 28 participants without a regional office, including residents of Niagara, St. Catharines, and Peterborough. Emerging leaders helped facilitate discussion about housing and economic justice, gaining experience while introducing others to the work.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN CALGARY

Calgary's civic engagement programming helped low-income residents learn about municipal government and prepare to participate in its proceedings. Workshops addressed municipal responsibilities and the city budget process, connecting residents' concerns with the decisions made at City Hall.

Preparation and practice gave participants opportunities to work on presenting their experiences in a public setting. Participation at City Hall carried this learning into a formal civic setting. Together with the November Leadership School, these activities supported residents in developing the knowledge and communication skills needed to contribute to municipal discussions.



TENANT RIGHTS EDUCATION AND ACCESS TO SUPPORT

Tenant education addresses practical questions: what a lease means, which repairs a landlord is responsible for, how to understand a notice, and where to find further assistance. Different provincial tenancy systems and municipal requirements make locally relevant information particularly important.

The January tenant rights session in Calgary, delivered with Calgary Legal Guidance, introduced residents to tenancy rights and sources of legal assistance. Elsewhere, Groundworks for Justice and Know Your Rights workshop announcements outlined planned education in British Columbia, Ontario, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. Their subjects reflected recurring concerns about housing stability, maintenance, and affordability.



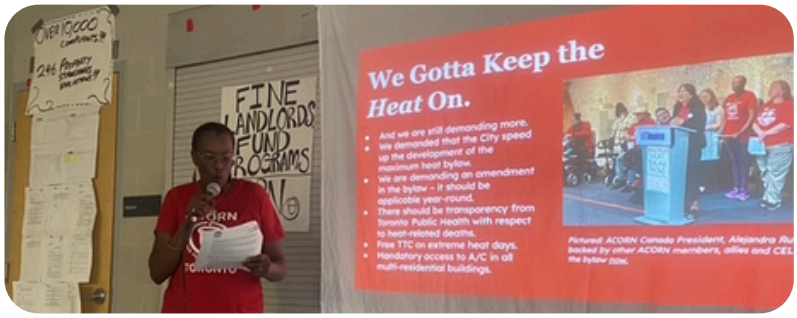


EVICTIONS & HOUSING STABILITY

Education about eviction helps residents understand notices, identify relevant procedures, and seek appropriate assistance. The year's workshop plans addressed wrongful evictions, fixed-term leases, and renovictions. Dartmouth's announced session focused partly on fixed-term leases, while London's planned programme included information about local renoviction protections.

Practical educational support also featured in Hamilton's Tenant Support Program. Leaders of Hamilton ACORN provided assistance to residents of 325 and 325A James Street South in understanding their rights and gathering evidence for Landlord and Tenant Board hearings. The Hamilton Community Legal Clinic provided separate legal services.

ENERGY POVERTY & HEALTHY HOMES



Energy research examined the relationship between household costs, building conditions, and the ability to keep a home at a comfortable temperature. It also considered how improvements could affect tenants' rents and utility bills.

Published in May, Crumbling Apartments in a Warming World: Tenants in an Energy Cost Crisis drew on 737 survey responses collected in 2024. Forty-four per cent of respondents reported having no air conditioning, and 67 per cent said that not all utilities were included in their rent. The 2025 publication brought these experiences together to inform understanding of energy poverty in rental housing.

Ontario's Who Pays for Green Retrofits? examined 16 above-guideline rent-increase applications involving energy-related work. It considered the implications of passing improvement costs on to tenants and discussed funding alternatives. A further research paper on Building Emissions Performance Standards examined affordability protections and tenants' access to information as buildings are improved.

In Atlantic Canada, the Heat & Housing Crisis survey began gathering experiences of heating, cooling, energy bills, and tenancy problems. Summer outreach introduced the survey in Halifax, Fredericton, and Moncton, with further collection activities reported in New Brunswick in August.

Energy education accompanied these research themes. The March leadership school included an energy-poverty presentation, and an Ontario-wide online meeting advertised for July included education about government responsibilities concerning extreme heat.

RENT INCREASES & HOUSEHOLD COSTS

Rent-increase education linked tenancy information with the financial pressures facing households. Toronto workshop announcements included above-guideline increases at a building-based session on Weston Road and a session at the Weston King Neighbourhood Centre. Fredericton's planned Know Your Rights workshop included information about rent-control protections and responding to increases.

Across these topics, access to specialist advice is an important part of useful education. Workshops can explain general information and identify resources, while legal clinics provide assistance within their own mandates.



RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

Research is an important part of understanding the conditions facing low- and moderate-income communities. In 2025, ACORN's publications examined rental housing conditions, displacement, energy costs, and neighbourhood safety. Tenant surveys and residents' accounts documented problems that can remain hidden when households are left to raise concerns individually.

The year's research also examined potential solutions, from improving enforcement of housing standards to protecting tenants from the costs of building upgrades. Reports made these findings available to residents, community partners, and public decision-makers.

CRUMBLING APARTMENTS IN A WARMING WORLD: TENANTS IN AN ENERGY COST CRISIS 🔗

National | May 2025

This national report examined how the condition of rental housing affects tenants' exposure to extreme heat and their ability to afford energy costs. It drew on 737 survey responses collected in 2024 from communities across Canada. Forty-four per cent of respondents reported having no air conditioning, while 67 per cent paid separately for at least some utilities. The research also explored tenants' experiences of energy-efficiency improvements and associated rent increases, highlighting the need to consider affordability alongside building performance.

STATE OF TENANT AFFAIRS 🔗

Waterloo Region | June 2025

Based on a survey of 160 tenants, this report examined eviction pressures, maintenance neglect, and landlord harassment. Twenty-eight per cent of respondents reported receiving an eviction notice within the previous five years. Twenty-four per cent said a repair or maintenance issue they reported was never addressed, and 28 per cent felt threatened when making complaints about their building. The findings connected housing conditions with insecurity, showing how tenants can face pressure to leave even while trying to obtain basic repairs.

WHO PAYS FOR GREEN RETROFITS? 🔗

Ontario | June 2025

This report examined the relationship between energy-related building improvements and above-guideline rent increases in Ontario. It brought together analysis of rent-increase applications, tenant testimony, and alternatives for financing retrofits. The research addressed a central affordability concern: improvements intended to make buildings more efficient can create additional financial pressure when their costs are passed on to renters. It considered how rental housing could be improved while protecting the low- and moderate-income households living in it.

MOHAWK ROAD SAFETY REPORT 🔗

Hamilton | June 2025

Hamilton's Mountain Chapter brought together municipal collision data, residents' accounts, and information about traffic fatalities to examine pedestrian and cyclist safety along Mohawk Road. The report documented concerns about speeding, inadequate crossings, and the difficulty of reaching nearby services safely, including for seniors and residents with mobility limitations. Recommendations addressed safer crossings, traffic calming, and improvements to pedestrian and cycling infrastructure.

PAYING MORE, GETTING LESS

Peel Region | August 2025

Peel's tenant survey report drew on responses from 257 tenants in Brampton and Mississauga, collected in May and June. Eighty-eight per cent of respondents said their building needed repairs, 39 per cent reported mould, and approximately one-third reported cockroaches. The research also examined above-guideline rent increases and differences in repair experiences across income groups. Its findings documented the combined pressure of high housing costs and poor conditions, providing evidence for recommendations on inspections and landlord accountability.

BUILDING EMISSIONS PERFORMANCE STANDARDS: RESPONSE FROM ACORN

Toronto | September 2025

This policy response examined how Toronto's proposed Building Emissions Performance Standards could affect tenants in multi-unit residential buildings. It considered the risk that heating-system changes could shift costs between landlords and tenants, particularly where tenants pay electricity separately. Recommendations addressed affordability conditions attached to retrofit funding, protection against rent increases and displacement, and further examination of how changes would affect utility bills. The paper emphasized the need to account for tenants' housing costs when designing emissions-reduction policies.



ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY RESEARCH

Local research also contributed to public education during the year. In London, ACORN shared findings from nearly 80 tenant survey responses: 84 per cent reported that repairs took too long or never happened, and 60 per cent reported ongoing pest problems. In Ottawa, findings from a State of Repairs report were used in an interactive educational activity at the June Healthy Homes meeting, connecting research with discussion of tenants' experiences and housing standards.

Research continued in Atlantic Canada through the Heat & Housing Crisis tenant survey, launched in July with outreach in Halifax, Fredericton, and Moncton. The survey gathered information about heating and cooling, energy bills, and tenancy problems to inform further work on housing and energy affordability.

2025 HIGHLIGHTS

- National and Local Leadership Schools prepared residents to take on community leadership roles. ACORN's 2025 National Leadership School brought together more than 20 emerging leaders in Gatineau for two days of skill development, with affordable housing and climate justice among the central themes. Calgary also held its first Leadership School in November, combining media training with municipal civics and practical preparation for deputing at City Hall.

- Research brought tenants' experiences into discussions about housing and climate policy. Published in May 2025, Crumbling Apartments in A Warming World drew on 737 survey responses collected throughout the previous year to examine energy costs, building conditions, and access to cooling. Local housing reports published in Waterloo Region, New Westminster, and Peel drew on a further 535 survey responses, documenting maintenance problems and housing insecurity. Together, these publications provided campaigns evidence grounded in residents' experiences and recommendations for improving rental housing.

- Healthy Homes Forums connected tenant education with community research and specialist knowledge. With forums in London, Ottawa, and Toronto bringing together hundreds of tenants, participants explored local repair-survey findings through interactive activities and shared their own experiences of housing conditions.



2025 DONORS & FUNDERS

Atkinson Foundation
Supported community education and engagement on decent work and a fair economy, alongside work to secure community benefits from infrastructure investments in Hamilton, Ottawa, and Toronto.

Maytree Foundation
Strengthened our research and communications capacity, suppoting policy resources and leadership development that help members participate in decisions affecting their communities.

Calgary Community Foundation
Supported Calgary Tenants Engaged building tenant leadership and bringing underrepresented residents' perspectives into local policy discussions.

Hamilton Community Fund
Supported tenant education and community leadership, helping residents understand their housing rights and participate in local decision-making.

London Community Fund
Supported tenant education and leadership development, helping renters access resources and contribute to housing policy discussions.

Ottawa Community Fund
Supported the Ottawa State of Repair initiative, bringing tenants' experiences of housing conditions into research and public education.

THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR GENEROUS DONORS AND FUNDERS


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