

IDEAS FOR ACTION

QUALITY JOBS 
AND LIVABLE INCOMES

HOMELESSNESS
AND HOUSING 

TRANSPORTATION 

SERVICE ACCESS FOR 
HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

FOOD SECURITY 

EDUCATION AND
LEARNING 

SYSTEMIC CHANGE 

POVERTY SOLUTIONS THEMES AND IDEAS FOR ACTION

The community has identified action is needed to reduce and eliminate poverty in seven theme areas. The ideas for action, developed by and with our HRM communities, have far-reaching implications for all orders of government and all sectors. Each sector and organization will need to assess and respond accordingly. The themes align with the strategies outlined in the HRM Strategic Plan for 2017-21 and include economic development, service delivery, healthy livable communities, social development, governance, engagement, and transportation.⁴¹

It takes a lot of work and commitment to build a prosperous and inclusive community. In some areas, HRM and United Way Halifax have the tools, resources, and authority to lead the way. In other areas, we must collaborate with other orders of government, the private sector, and community organizations to counter poverty, promote inclusive economic growth, and ensure community development. Where the municipality does not have jurisdiction, advocacy to the provincial and federal governments is needed.

What follows over the next pages are 129 ideas for action. These ideas are organized by three objectives: Address Immediate Needs, Pathways to Prosperity, and Systemic Change⁴³ and seven important focus areas for change.

-  **Quality Jobs and Livable Incomes**
-  **Transportation**
-  **Food Security**
-  **Homelessness and Housing**
-  **Services Access for Health and Well-Being**
-  **Education and Learning**
-  **Systemic Change**

In describing each focus area and the related ideas for action, we've highlighted how the experience is not felt one issue at a time but as an assault of many issues. We also organized actions to demonstrate how we can help people who are living in poverty cope with the immediate impacts, while also identifying ways to address root cause and generate longer-term solutions that will end poverty for all.

"From coast to coast to coast, in communities large and small, urban and rural, municipalities are the order of government closest to people's lives. Their local solutions are helping tackle national challenges-from growth and productivity to climate change-and are building a more livable, competitive Canada." ⁴²

Federation of Canadian Municipalities



QUALITY JOBS AND LIVABLE INCOMES

Ensuring everyone in our community has livable incomes and opportunities for quality jobs is essential to eliminating poverty in HRM.

Although poverty is not only about a lack of income, insufficient money to pay for basic needs creates barriers that exacerbate inequities and issues with access. Income insecurity also socially isolates, as people are not able to fully participate in community life. We heard from our community consultations that income security is vital to addressing the other priority areas such as housing and food security.

Income insecurity is exacerbated for community members by the prevalence of precarious and low-wage jobs. There has been significant growth in temporary or contract work since the 1980s. These jobs are characterized by insecurity, lack of benefits, and offering little to no career growth. Racialized communities, women, and particularly racialized women, are disproportionately impacted by the growth in precarious employment.^{44(p11)} Precarious employment is also characterized by low wages. A recent survey (2014) found that over half of workers in precarious employment made less than \$40,000/year.^{44(p10)}

Work that can pay a living wage is difficult to find. Of the 58,830 people living on incomes at or below the low income measure (LIM-AT) in our community, many are employed and yet struggling to meet their basic needs. We need to improve the quality of jobs available to HRM residents to ensure that the economic growth that our municipality experiences is equitably shared.

We also understand that not everyone can work. People experience challenges, such as disability, that can limit their ability to participate in the workforce. Other people are not provided with equitable opportunities due to the impact of racism, discrimination, and marginalization.

The income assistance system is supposed to provide a social safety net, but its inadequacy is a significant barrier faced by many in our community. Often people become trapped in the net. Assistance rates and special needs supports are insufficient; clients have earnings clawed back at high rates; and there is a need for better supports for those living with a disability, and those seeking education and training opportunities. The income assistance system should provide a safety net that has resilience or "the bounce back" built into it. It should be a system that

provides people with the supports and income to meet their basic needs and participate fully in our community.

Residents of HRM without income security are missing out on our municipality's prosperity. Advocacy groups within our community and across Canada are asking for governments and businesses to take action on increasing income equality.

Of the 58,830 people living on incomes at or below the low income measure (LIM-AT) in our community, many are employed and yet struggling to meet their basic needs.

The Department of Community Services has committed to implement a transformation project that will impact the Employment Services and Income Assistance (ESIA) program. Transformations include reducing the claw back rate for earned income, and increasing income assistance rates in 2019. Unfortunately, several agencies and community advocates, and numerous participants in our consultations, are indicating the changes are not sufficient and will not address the problem. Rates need to increase to levels that enable clients to meet their basic needs and participate fully in our community. The system needs to be transformed to ensure that clients are treated with dignity and respect. A recent study found that a family of four relying on income assistance in our province would need an additional \$986.44 a month to afford to eat healthily.^{45(p22)} Through the Poverty Solutions consultations, the inadequacy of the income assistance program was emphasized over and over again. It was identified as the number one barrier that people in our community encounter. It traps people into a cycle of poverty and desperation.

To make substantial changes to the income assistance levels, the federal government would need to work with

provincial governments, and increase transfer payments. As the federal government is currently developing a National Poverty Reduction Strategy, we as a community need to advocate for all orders of government to collaborate to build an income assistance system which respects human rights, provides basic necessities to its clients, and ensures they can fully participate in our community. It is essential for the health of our community that we build resilience into our social safety net.

There is a large portion of our population that are fully employed and struggling to meet basic needs. They are the working poor. The municipality is exploring a policy framework for consideration of social economic benefit, employee compensation/living wage, and environmental impacts in the procurement process. This has the potential to provide a livable income to many in our community. Basic Income Nova Scotia is also advocating for a feasibility study into creating a basic income in Nova Scotia. A basic income would lift thousands out of poverty by providing an income sufficient for the necessities of life, including food, clothing, shelter, childcare, and other resources that facilitate social engagement, such as access to transportation. It has the potential to benefit both ESIA clients and the working poor.

Creating quality jobs and liveable incomes is not the sole responsibility of government though, and the private sector has an important role to play. Organizations such as Common Good Solutions are supporting entrepreneurs, non-profits, and cooperatives to start and grow social enterprises. Social enterprises compete in the market place, but have a dual purpose of generating income and achieving a social, cultural, or environmental mission. Stone Hearth Bakery, Café and Catering services is operated by MetroWorks Employment Association to provide meaningful training and employment opportunities for individuals living with mental illness and experiencing barriers to employment. Other organizations, such as The Cooperators, are paying employees a living wage.

A basic income would lift thousands out of poverty by providing an income sufficient for the necessities of life, including food, clothing, shelter, childcare, and other resources that facilitate social engagement, such as access to transportation.



ADDRESS IMMEDIATE NEEDS

1. Improve the quality of and access to income supports.

- 1.1 Advocate and work with the provincial and federal governments to raise social assistance rates and other income supports and benefits (ex: tax credits).
- 1.2 Advocate and work with the provincial government to ensure income supports and services meet residents' needs by reducing barriers and increasing supports (ex: allowing individuals to retain greater earned income, while maintaining eligibility; reviewing the special needs list to reflect actual cost and needs).
- 1.3 Better assist low-income and marginalized residents to access childcare spaces and fee subsidies.
- 1.4 Improve access to health benefits, including dental, pharma, and vision care, for those transitioning to employment from Employment Services and Income Assistance (ESIA) and Nova Scotia Disability Support Program.
- 1.5 Work with all levels of government and community partners to complete a feasibility study looking in detail at how to implement a basic income.



PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY

2. Create more employment opportunities for low-income and marginalized populations with high unemployment rates and barriers to employment.

- 2.1 Increase access to skill development programs to expand opportunities for marginalized populations.
- 2.2 Develop and provide flexible childcare models that align with the current labour market realities and enable greater participation in the workforce among low-income and marginalized families.
- 2.3 Collaborate with business and community partners to better understand workforce gaps and opportunities for employment.
- 2.4 Provide opportunities for ongoing training for employers around inclusion and cultural competency to influence more inclusive recruitment and hiring practices.
- 2.5 Support low-income and marginalized youth to access volunteer and job opportunities.
- 2.6 Advocate with the provincial government to support participation in the workforce by maintaining open income assistance files, to allow individuals to cycle in and out of the workforce as their situation changes.

3. Raise incomes of marginalized populations.

- 3.1 Work with public and private employers to implement a living wage (ex: develop a Living Wage Network).
- 3.2 Advocate and work with the federal and provincial governments to increase minimum wage and improve labour standards.
- 3.3 Support pension savings (ex: Registered Disability Savings Plan: RDSP) for people with disabilities, and their families and caregivers.
- 3.4 Complete a pilot study and advocate for a full implementation of a basic income.
- 3.5 Explore and consider the benefits of restructuring the tax system (ex: modify tax policy to create a new tax bracket so that individuals living on low-income do not pay provincial income tax; convert existing non-refundable tax credits to refundable credits).
- 3.6 Explore opportunities to increase access to business loans, credit, and other support for marginalized populations.



TRANSPORTATION

In the consultations, participants emphasized the barriers to accessible and affordable transportation. People described the inadequacy of the transportation system, and emphasized the importance of linking low-income neighbourhoods to other areas of the community – increasing access to employment, recreation, and other goods and services.

The cost, reliability, routing, and timing of Halifax Transit are significant barriers for many. Residents of suburban and rural HRM emphasized the limited or total lack of access to public transit options, and the inadequacy of relying on sharing rides with neighbours, community transportation options, or expensive taxis. Many are forced into expensive car ownership.

People requiring Access-a-Bus face a system that does not accommodate all equipment, and requires a week's notice to book. Taxis are expensive, and there are not many that are accessible.

Rural, suburban, and urban residents described the social isolation and difficulty accessing goods and services that occur because of a lack of accessible and affordable transportation options.

A number of steps have been taken to make Halifax Transit more affordable for residents. The annual Low Income Transit program makes monthly transit passes more affordable for low-income residents, allowing participants to purchase adult transit passes at 50% off the regular price. Most recently, HRM, Halifax Transit, and the Province partnered to provide transit passes to all income assistance recipients, their spouses, and dependents that live in an area serviced by public transportation. This new bus pass program will impact more than 16,000 residents.⁴⁶

Barriers to transportation are not just about affordability though, and it is important that HRM and other partners work to build an integrated transportation system. The

Halifax Regional Council voted unanimously for the Integrated Mobility Plan (IMP) in December 2017.⁴⁷ Although there is some rural focus in the IMP, working further with members of the rural community to develop local solutions outside of what is named in the IMP will be important.

Transportation includes vehicles (ex: cars, trains, buses). It also includes other forms of mobility such as walking, rolling, and cycling. Accessibility must also be considered so our municipality (urban, suburban, and rural) is walkable and wheelchair accessible.

People described the inadequacy of the transportation system, and emphasized the importance of linking low-income neighbourhoods to other areas of the community – increasing access to employment, recreation, and other goods and services.



ADDRESS IMMEDIATE NEEDS

4. Make transportation more affordable and accessible for low-income residents and marginalized populations.

- 4.1 Seniors and youth 18 and under ride public transit free.
- 4.2 Provide low-income transit passes.
- 4.3 Comply with the Accessibility Act by using an integrated approach to create an efficient 24/7 paratransit service. This will ensure the public transportation system is fully accessible and available when people need it (ex: improve the reliability, flexibility, and accessibility of the Access-a-Bus system).
- 4.4 Ensure access to an adequate transportation allowance for ESIA recipients in rural areas who have limited public transit access.

- 4.5 Support partnerships that increase access to affordable and accessible transportation through the establishment and expansion of community transportation (ex: community vans, vehicle share options, accessible van share options).
- 4.6 Increase the number of accessible taxis.
- 4.7 Support community transportation options for moving (ex: community moving van or truck).
- 4.8 Support and advocate for the development of active transportation infrastructure (e.g. sidewalks, bike lanes, etc.).

A poverty-free HRM has transit that is accessible, inexpensive and covers the entire municipality.

HRM Resident



PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY

5. Improve transportation services in urban, suburban, and rural HRM.

- 5.1 Increase reliability, availability, and access across the Halifax Transit system, linking people with community, employment, and services.
- 5.2 Ensure equitable access to public transportation across the HRM.

When people have inadequate income, food is often the last priority. It is the \$20 that is leftover for the month after other expenses such as housing, utilities, childcare, and transportation are paid for. People often do not have the income to afford nutritious food, or to pay for the transportation to get to the grocery store or food bank. Food insecurity can seem invisible when it comes to poverty, but there are many barriers to accessing affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods, including income security, transportation, and accessibility.

Throughout the community consultations, people described their difficulties accessing affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food in the private market. Accessing food through food banks can pose additional challenges to getting food because of stigma, as well as restrictions related to timing, location, and availability of culturally appropriate food. Many people turn to food banks as a last resort. Food banks served 7,062 unique individuals from 2,921 households in HRM for the month of March 2017. Approximately one-third of the individuals helped were children and youth.⁴⁸

The access to enough healthy food is a human right. Canada has ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and must guarantee progressive improvement on the realization of the right

to an adequate standard of living, including the right to food.⁴⁹ People in our community should not be forced to rely on food banks. Our community should be one where people have a choice in what they eat – where they have enough affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food to meet their needs.

There is a lot of important community work related to food security underway in HRM. The Halifax Food Policy Alliance, with many grassroots connections, has gained traction over the past couple of years, and is the driving force behind the creation of a Food Charter for Halifax. Additionally, the work of The Food Action Research Centre (Food ARC) has contributed a great deal to this movement through research, engagement, capacity building, and advocacy efforts.

Our community is working to increase access to food throughout HRM.

The Mobile Food Market brings fresh, high quality, and affordable food to neighbourhoods with limited access to healthy food. Using a converted Halifax Transit bus, the market currently visits six communities throughout HRM. The work of the Dartmouth North Community Food Centre provides an equitable, neighbourhood approach to addressing food insecurity and poverty. It has made incredible progress in making a difference. The Food Centre

not only provides accessible food programming to increase food security, it also supports people through referrals and volunteer opportunities to contribute to the community. Users can be volunteers and build their skill set and a sense of belonging in community. The food centre model is adaptable and scalable. Several neighbourhoods in need in HRM are interested in the food centre model.

Food banks served 7,062 unique individuals from 2,921 households in HRM for the month of March 2017.

Approximately one-third of the individuals helped were children and youth.

Feed Nova Scotia Client Registry, 2017



ADDRESS IMMEDIATE NEEDS

6. Eliminate hunger by increasing access to and availability of affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food in neighbourhoods and communities.

- 6.1 Increase the dignity of accessing food banks (ex: expand food bank times to the weekend and allow access more than once a month; improve the quality of food; volunteer training).
- 6.2 Expand nutrition programs for children and youth in collaboration with the Department of Health and Wellness, Nourish Nova Scotia, school boards, community-based organizations, and other levels of government (ex: school breakfast, snack, and lunch programs; edible school gardens).

- 6.3 Reduce food waste (ex: selling imperfect produce and vegetables at a reduced price).
- 6.4 Provide healthy, affordable food and beverage options within municipally-owned and operated facilities and programs.
- 6.5 Increase funding and empower communities to do more community food programming, like community gardens.
- 6.6 Establish enabling policies and processes to facilitate food initiatives on municipal land and facilities.
- 6.7 Empower residents through place-based agencies with food skills, information, and access to equipment and tools.



PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY

7. Support the development of a Food Charter and Food Strategy for HRM.

- 7.1 Identify and eliminate food deserts by developing public private partnerships to create service models which address food security and access needs in neighbourhoods.
- 7.2 Remove barriers to expand urban agriculture on government lands.
- 7.3 Invest in community-based food centres that increase access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food, and help navigate access to services.
- 7.4 Support the development of procurement mechanisms to create efficient, cost effective, healthy, and local food access across sectors (ex: schools; regulated childcare centres; and recreation and sport settings).

First Voice Story

We have limited access to fresh foods. We can only afford to live on unhealthy junk. I need to have my rent subsidized so I can afford to live in the north end. That's not right.

I work a full-time job, sometimes I work two full-time jobs. We don't enjoy anything. We can't

go anywhere. We pay our bills and go to work, or should I say, decide what bills we can afford to pay this month. There is no enjoying a night at the movies or restaurant with the family.

Can I afford the power bill? Can we get a box of rice to cover us until next payday? Do I have enough bus

tickets to get to work this week or do I have to walk two hours to get there? When do I get to spend time with my son if I'm working all the time and then stressed about finances the rest? I'd like to sleep and not worry about life.

HRM Resident



HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING

Homelessness and affordable, accessible housing was one of the most prevalent themes that arose out of the community consultations.

In 2016 there were 1,609 people in Halifax shelters.^{50(p2)} More than 2 in 5 tenants and just over 1 in 10 home owners spent more than 30% of their income on housing in HRM.¹⁷

People are struggling to pay for housing because of low wages or lack of income and a lack of affordable, accessible, safe, and appropriate housing across the municipality. In urban HRM average rents increased from \$987 in 2016 to \$1,027 in 2017, while the vacancy rate fell from 2.6% to 2.3%. The vacancy has not been this low since 2003.⁵¹

Populations at Risk: While homelessness can affect many, some populations are more at risk of experiencing homelessness than others. Single adult males between the ages of 25 and 55 account for almost half of the homeless population in Canada. In HRM, 67.8% of shelter users in 2016 identified as male. Youth, Indigenous people, and women and families experiencing poverty and violence are also at greater risk of homelessness.^{52(p7)}

Immigrants and refugees bring additional considerations for housing solutions. Providing temporary shelter and affordable housing needs to include cultural awareness

and cultural competency training so that these services are accessible for immigrant clients. Specific areas for consideration include size of families, interpretation, importance of keeping families together with older children, and culturally appropriate food and programs.

The Hidden Homeless: Many people experiencing homelessness are hidden. They are 'couch surfing' with friends, family, or strangers, rough sleeping (on streets or in cars), or have inappropriate housing. They do not have a sustainable long-term living arrangement, or the ability to secure permanent housing. These people are the 'hidden homeless' because they generally do not access homeless supports and services, and therefore are not captured in the homelessness data. This means that the number of people in our community experiencing homelessness is higher than what is being reported in the statistics.

Homeless Youth: Many youth in our community experience precarious housing and homelessness as well. Nearly 60% of homeless youth in Canada were part of the child welfare system at some point in their lives.^{25(p4)} Involvement with the child welfare system is associated with negative outcomes in housing, education, employment, justice, and overall health and wellness.²⁴ It makes youth vulnerable to experiencing poverty throughout their adult lives.

Many people are forced to make decisions between shelter, food, and other necessities, like transportation. "Affordable" housing units are often in disrepair or located in communities that lack employment opportunities, affordable and accessible transportation, and access to goods and services. There is also a lack of rental units in rural and suburban HRM.

There is a significant amount of work being done in the community to address issues of homelessness and affordable housing.

Mobile Outreach Street Health (MOSH) Housing First has housed 70 people who were chronically or episodically homeless. The Housing First approach provides people with a home and individualized care plans to support them to stay housed in the community.

Community-based organizations such as Halifax Housing Help, the Public Good Society, and others, provide much needed support in helping people access affordable housing. A cross-sector group from the Nova Scotia Health Authority, Corrections, shelters, and service providers, is working to develop common discharge protocols to ensure no one ends up on the street when exiting hospitals, correctional facilities, and other institutions.

The federal government released the National Housing Strategy (NHS) in November 2017, aimed at reducing chronic homelessness by 50%, removing 530,000 families from housing need, and building up to 100,000 new affordable homes. It includes a housing benefit, or rent supplement for low-income tenants, as well as various initiatives and funds to maintain and develop affordable housing.⁵³ It will require co-operation between the federal and provincial governments.

The Housing and Homelessness Partnership developed a Community Plan to End Homelessness and an Affordable Housing Plan with targets that have already been endorsed by Halifax Regional Council.

Some of the initiatives that Housing and Homeless Partnership members support include the above-mentioned Housing First and development of discharge protocols.

Homelessness and housing poverty are more than just a lack of affordable housing. These ideas for action will inform the work of the many service providers, governments, and private sector partners who aim to end homelessness, create affordable housing, and foster a strong service provider and housing sector in our community.



ADDRESS IMMEDIATE NEEDS

8. Minimize new intakes and returns to shelters.

- 8.1 Coordinate intakes and referrals to shelters for the homeless.
- 8.2 Create and maintain emergency housing for marginalized populations who do not fit the traditional shelter model (ex: family housing; people with disability; LGBTQ2SIA+; youth).
- 8.3 Expand and coordinate Housing First.
- 8.4 Increase the number of housing support workers and related resources to manage lower acuity shelter users.
- 8.5 Develop a core competencies training model for service providers.
- 8.6 Create an emergency fund to assist people in securing and maintaining housing.
- 8.7 Implement and expand wrap around supports embedded in the delivery of housing programs for marginalized populations.

"I was happy to be in the jail because it was the most secure housing I had."

Phoenix Youth focus group participant

1,609

people in Halifax shelters in 2016

2 in 5

number of tenants that spend 30% or more on housing. This compares to 1 in 10 for home owners.

9. In collaboration with the Indigenous community, respond to the Urban Aboriginal Homelessness Community Action Plan.

- 9.1 Develop hostel accommodation.
- 9.2 Expand addictions and mental health supports.
- 9.3 Implement a case management model linked to other community-based organizations.
- 9.4 Expand family housing linked to Mi'kmaw Children and Family Services.
- 9.5 Increase the number of affordable units for Indigenous housing providers.

10. Sustain community assets in shelters, transitional, and permanent supportive housing.

- 10.1 Increase investments and supports to ensure the quality and sustainability of shelters, and non-market housing.

11. Improve the quality of all affordable housing.

Calls to action to preserve or upgrade 2000 existing affordable housing units:

- 11.1 Identify the capital needs of non-market and private units in need of repair, and allocate required resources.
- 11.2 Increase the number of licensed single room occupancy (SRO) units by developing a pilot project based on best practices.
- 11.3 Advocate and work with HRM to strengthen the enforcement of minimum housing standards (M-200).
- 11.4 Develop a public database of by-law infractions.
- 11.5 Develop and implement a municipal bed bug strategy.
- 11.6 Expand incentive programs for private landlords and low-income homeowners to improve the quality and energy efficiency of dedicated, long-term affordable housing.

12. Reduce the number of HRM residents living in core housing need.

Calls to action to create 250 rental supplements:

- 12.1 Advocate and work with the provincial and federal governments for long-term commitment to continuing existing rental supplements.
- 12.2 Work with governments, private landlords, and non-profits to phase in additional rent supplements for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
- 12.3 Increase the flexibility of the rent supplement program by introducing a portable housing benefit.
- 12.4 Advocate and work with governments to develop rent supplements, and to develop rent geared to income approaches.



PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY

13. Increase the supply of affordable housing options that meet the needs of marginalized populations and communities.

- 13.1 Prioritize community-based affordable housing options for people with disability, seniors, and people with mental health conditions (ex: home sharing options between seniors and youth).
- 13.2 Identify opportunities to create accessible units through universal design.

Calls to action to create 1000 new social housing units:

- 13.3 Work with community-based organizations and other partners to enable non-profit housing providers to coordinate efforts and pool resources to build affordable housing.
- 13.4 Provide surplus government and community group land for new affordable housing developments, or dedicate a percentage of net proceeds from land sales to affordable housing.
- 13.5 Assist non-market housing organizations to leverage capital to create new affordable housing units by working with community partners such as government, private capital, social enterprise etc.

Calls to action to create 1000 new affordable private rental units, and 500 new secondary suites:

- 13.6 Continue to pursue and advocate for a review of land use planning policies and bylaws to increase affordable housing options (ex: tiny homes, rooming houses, secondary suites etc.).
- 13.7 Expand density bonusing and inclusionary zoning throughout the HRM.
- 13.8 Advocate for the provincial government to incorporate inclusionary zoning and rental preservation in the HRM Charter.
- 13.9 Develop a proposal for the administration of affordable housing units resulting from density bonusing and inclusionary zoning.

Calls to action to create 250 affordable ownership units:

- 13.10 Work with government and community partners to develop a new home ownership program for low to middle income individuals and families.



PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY

14. Foster a strong housing sector by strengthening and building capacity for increased effectiveness.

- 14.1 Create a central online registry of community-based and non-profit housing organizations and available units.
- 14.2 Host an annual symposium and other programming to build the capacity of the non-profit sector.
- 14.3 Support the creation of community land trusts, and non-profit development resource and management groups.
- 14.4 Enable professional management of housing stock through access to financial and capital planning software.



SERVICE ACCESS FOR HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

The primary factors that shape the health of people in our community are not medical treatments or lifestyle choices, but rather the social, economic, and environmental living conditions they experience.

“Parents working for low wages do whatever they can to provide for their children as best they can, but instead of being able to enjoy quality time or provide what they know their children need, they are constantly struggling and stressed.”^{54(p9)}

These circumstances are shaped by the unfair distribution of money, power, and resources that are needed to support people to achieve their full health potential. Understanding and addressing the social determinants of health is a key component to reducing health inequities. Improving health inequities can be achieved by increasing awareness, creating healthy, vibrant environments and ensuring equitable access to services, resources, and opportunities for all to be healthy.

People with increased access to services and resources to address the social determinants of health are likely to have longer and healthier lives; conversely, those people living in poverty are more likely to be ill, injured or have shorter life spans.⁵⁵

Our consultations illustrated that people living in poverty often have difficulty navigating and accessing affordable, appropriate health care services, mental health and addictions services, recreation services, and other programs and supports necessary for maintaining their health and well-being.

Many community-based organizations play important roles in helping people navigate the complex social assistance system. For example, Chebucto Connections runs an initiative called ECHO Hub, which collaborates with physicians and service providers in the Spryfield community to work on diagnosing poverty. Individuals can get a referral from a physician to ECHO Hub, where a skilled social worker assists in providing wrap around supports offered by a series of 18 service providers in the community that address the social determinants of health.

We can also learn from what other communities are doing. The City of Calgary has adopted a Fair Entry program to reduce the stigma of accessing support. The Fair Entry program supports access to multiple programs and services with only one application with eligibility based on income.

Neighbourhood level services provided by agencies and municipal assets, such as the public libraries and community centres, should also be coordinated to better address the social determinants of health. These place-based responses to poverty adapt to the unique needs of the neighbourhoods and communities within HRM, and with their residents. This is important to eliminating poverty in a comprehensive and responsive way, as the experience of poverty can vary significantly among neighbourhoods, and even within several blocks. This is especially crucial in HRM which is home to the largest number of urban, suburban, and rural residents in our province.

Parents working for low wages do whatever they can to provide for their children as best they can, but instead of being able to enjoy quality time or provide what they know their children need, they are constantly struggling and stressed.



ADDRESS IMMEDIATE NEEDS

15. Increase the coordination, awareness, and capacity of service providers to focus on equity and increase access and availability for everyone.

- 15.1 Establish a Fair Entry program for municipal programs, with a focus on increasing access for marginalized people to recreation and other services that could be subsidized or free.
- 15.2 Collaborate with Service Nova Scotia and other partners to increase timely access and reduce the cost of obtaining identification documentation.
- 15.3 Protect and increase provision of effective services and infrastructure for marginalized populations.

16. Advocate for mental health and addiction supports.

- 16.1 Advocate for the provincial mental health and addictions strategy to be implemented.
- 16.2 Increase capacity and funding for community-based mental health services that focus on prevention, as well as treatment, for marginalized populations.



PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY

17. Ensure healthcare and pharmacare are accessible, inclusive, responsive, and appropriate.

- 17.1 Ensure that pharmacare is equitable (ex: affordable, acceptable, and available).
- 17.2 Train healthcare providers to understand health inequities and to coordinate with community hubs to support navigation and better access to services.

18. Reduce social isolation of marginalized populations.

- 18.1 Reduce social isolation by providing more affordable and accessible culture and recreation opportunities.
- 18.2 Create inclusive recreation through the provision of equitable opportunities, access, and supports for children, youth, and adults with special needs.
- 18.3 Provide children and youth with universal cultural and recreation passports (ex: Discovery Centre, museums, art galleries etc.).
- 18.4 Increase funding for support services that provide respite and support independence in the community for children, youth, and adults with disability.
- 18.5 Provide funding and support for assistive devices and technology, including access to interpreters and translators.
- 18.6 Create affordable adult day programming for people with disabilities and seniors.
- 18.7 Invest in more services and supports for new immigrants and refugees (ex: language classes).



EDUCATION AND LEARNING

Education and lifelong learning, from birth through adulthood, are significantly impacted by poverty. Our consultations highlighted that families have difficulty accessing quality, affordable childcare, pre-school and after school programs, and educational supports.

Food security, housing, precarious employment, and other barriers resulting from poverty influence the educational outcomes of children. These barriers make it more difficult for children to participate in and benefit from the education system, affecting their future ability to access post secondary education, training and apprenticeship programs, and to obtain quality employment. This ultimately increases the likelihood they will experience poverty as adults.

Schools Plus provides government and other services to students and families at schools to support their success. Some of the measures being taken now are referred to as intensive and individualized supports. The expansion of these initiatives and increased relations with community-based organizations are seen as an excellent opportunity to create success for students and families who struggle with the experience of poverty.

The importance of access to educational and vocational training for people with diverse abilities was emphasized throughout the consultations. ReachAbility offers programs to foster pre-employment skills, and partners with employers to create diverse and inclusive workforces.

Families, however, also expressed the need for young people with disabilities to have greater support to access post-secondary and vocational opportunities through care worker funding. These individuals and their families experience a high level of social isolation due to the lack of access to these opportunities.

Good quality, accessible childcare emerged as a need across theme areas. Lack of affordable, quality, and accessible childcare often keeps people completely out of the labour force or stuck in precarious employment situations. It impacts the ability of parents and caregivers to access educational opportunities to advance career paths, and break the cycle of poverty for their families.

“What made the difference for me was access to education, meaningful employment opportunities along the way, and eventually the ability to earn living wages. These are the foundations that continue to improve my quality of life.”

HRM Resident

Affordable childcare and early education development programs are essential for breaking the cycle of poverty in our community. A recent report (2016) on childcare emphasizes:

"Early Development Instrument (EDI) data shows that one in four Nova Scotian children now arrive at elementary school vulnerable in one or more developmental areas. Even with extra supports and remediation programs in school, it is often too late to change the learning trajectories established in early childhood."^{55(p1)}

There have been some steps taken by government to provide quality, accessible, and affordable early learning

and child care. In 2017 the provincial government introduced the universal, free pre-primary program. In January 2018 the provincial and federal governments signed a new bilateral agreement providing \$35 million over three years for early learning and child care. This agreement will create more than 100 new child care sites and boost subsidies for families earning between \$35,000 and \$70,000 per year.⁵⁶

Access to educational opportunities and affordable, quality childcare is essential to create pathways out of poverty, and break the cycle that many of our community members are stuck in.

Early Development Instrument (EDI) data shows that one in four Nova Scotian children now arrive at elementary school vulnerable in one or more developmental areas.



ADDRESS IMMEDIATE NEEDS

19. Increase accessibility of education.

- 19.1 Expand Schools Plus efforts by working with community-based organizations to provide a holistic approach to education.
- 19.2 Provide more supports for students with a disability in postsecondary and vocational education (ex: funding for support workers).
- 19.3 Increase the amount of supplementary funding to ensure equitable access to extra academic activities (ex: social, cultural, and philanthropic opportunities – field trips, music and art classes, and other school activities).
- 19.4 Develop better options for youth with disabilities to transition from school into meaningful work and learning opportunities.
- 19.5 Explore sliding scales for tuition, and student loan forgiveness.

20. Improve access to affordable, quality childcare and after school programming.

- 20.1 Provide accessible and affordable transportation for after school care and the new pre-primary program.
- 20.2 Create a childcare strategy, including increasing subsidized day care spots, portable childcare subsidies, and a waitlist strategy.
- 20.3 Provide free after school programs and tutoring.
- 20.4 Provide universal childcare and more early education and intervention programs, including more spots for infants under 18 months.
- 20.5 Provide subsidies and other supports to make day cares accessible for children with disabilities.



PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY

21. Ensure equitable access to lifelong, quality learning.

- 21.1 Governments, community-based organizations, businesses, and other partners work collaboratively to improve opportunities for good quality education and apprenticeship opportunities.
- 21.2 Ensure equitable access to literacy, adult education, and training for all HRM residents.
- 21.3 Provide opportunities for seniors to volunteer as readers and literacy coaches.
- 21.4 Increase access to the Options and Opportunities programming for youth.
- 21.5 Work with community partners and businesses to support mentorship programs for youth and marginalized people.
- 21.6 Support parents with opportunities to upgrade education and provide homework support to their children.



SYSTEMIC CHANGE

The barriers faced by many in our community require systemic change. The need to approach this work holistically, comprehensively, and with a sense of universality and affordability is essential to eliminate poverty. We will not solve homelessness if we do not address the systemic issues that lead to income insecurity. We will not raise people's incomes and increase access to services and supports until we address issues of racism and colonialism. Poverty is not caused by one single issue, but rather is the result of a system that marginalizes people. The system needs to change.

The systemic nature of poverty has resulted in the marginalization of some of our residents. The current social support systems available to our residents have been steeped in a history of colonization, racism, sexism, ableism, capitalism, heterosexism, cissexism, and do not equitably address their needs or work to mitigate those factors that keep them marginalized.

In our consultations, we heard residents describe a system in which they were forgotten, ignored, or actively discriminated against. This resulted in an inability to meet their basic needs, never mind foster their prosperity or provide the conditions for them to flourish. These circumstances were seen to be near impossible to escape, and almost certain to impact their children and future grandchildren in similar ways.

The constant struggle to survive in a system where you are actively oppressed does not provide people with the opportunity to focus on individual growth or actively participate in measures to change oppressive systems. As we move forward, we need to ensure that groups experiencing oppression and systemic barriers are provided with the supports needed to actively and meaningfully participate in initiatives that aim to change our municipality for everyone's betterment.

We believe we all have a role to play – businesses, community-based organizations and advocates, experts by experience, and all orders of government. We need to come together as a community to foster unique initiatives, practices, and policies that will create prosperity for all our residents.

There are examples of great work being done across our community that we can further support or use as models to inform best practices. The Halifax Local Immigration Partnership, for example, works with multi-sector partners to help recent immigrants settle into HRM and ensure that our community is welcoming. This is imperative to create a system that is responsive to the diverse needs of our community.

Canada has a long history of colonialism and racism, which requires systemic change. There are 94 Calls to Action made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that we can collaborate with Indigenous communities to action and implement. We must also recognize the impact racism and colonialism has had on the African Nova Scotian population, and the Nova Scotia Government is working with the African Nova Scotian population to access land titles.

Systemic change requires us to recognize the impact of racism and colonialism on our community, and it requires our community to leverage its economic power to ensure everyone enjoys its prosperity. Currently, HRM is exploring a social procurement policy and living wage ordinance. A staff report is due in 2018. Basic Income Nova Scotia is advocating for a feasibility study, and in Ontario, the provincial government is piloting basic income in six communities.

Systems change is difficult and it is complex. It requires organizations, governments, businesses, and community members to shift their thinking and behaviour. It requires our community to recognize the structural injustices, stigma, racism, capitalism, and legacies of colonialism that continue to marginalize residents. Systems change requires us to recognize that poverty is a violation of human rights.

Systemic change requires us to recognize the impact of racism and colonialism on our community, and it requires our community to leverage its economic power to ensure everyone enjoys in its prosperity.

22. Empower the non-profit sector to grow their capacity to eliminate poverty.

- 22.1 Stabilize core funding for community-based organizations.
- 22.2 Advocate for the federal government to allow charities to devote more than 10% of their total resources to advocacy.
- 22.3 Support capacity building for the non-profit sector (ex: online knowledge base on best practices; workshops, etc.).

23. Leverage the economic power of HRM to stimulate job growth, support local businesses, and drive inclusive economic growth.

- 23.1 Design and implement a community benefits program for HRM purchasing and capital investments.
- 23.2 Design and implement a municipal social procurement policy.
- 23.3 Work with HRM to implement a living wage ordinance for all municipal staff and third party contractors.
- 23.4 Working with local institutions, connect job seekers, start-up businesses, social enterprises, and worker-owned co-operatives to create more economic opportunities.
- 23.5 Develop models to enhance economic development in low-income communities.

24. Create a seamless social support system.

- 24.1 Increase the level of community navigation, outreach, and capacity by developing a Neighbourhood Strategy featuring place-based responses to support individuals experiencing poverty.
- 24.2 Develop a Community Hubs Plan with HRM and other levels of government to support poverty elimination efforts in neighbourhoods and communities.
- 24.3 Coordinate seamless care and support among hospitals, the child welfare system, Employment Support and Income Assistance, correction and mental health facilities, and HRM services (ex: develop common discharge protocols).
- 24.4 Work with governments to remove legislative and financial barriers to the creation of one stop community access sites for key health, education, and social services that also serve as focal points for community building.
- 24.5 Implement a basic income as a means to provide a live income for low-income and marginalized populations.

25. Experts by Experiences (lived experience) are included in decision making processes.

- 25.1 Develop, resource, and use effective models to meaningfully engage people with lived experience in the decision-making of community-based organizations and governments. Provide a living wage, childcare, transportation, food, and other supports needed including ASL interpreters and language translators.

26. Recognize and reconcile the impact of colonialism and systemic racism on the African Nova Scotian and Indigenous people.

- 26.1 Implement the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action.
- 26.2 Guided by their respective communities, work in collaboration to reconcile the impact of racism and colonialism on the African Nova Scotian and Indigenous people (ex: structural, institutional, interpersonal, internalized) and the resulting inequitable outcomes.
- 26.3 Expand cultural competency and trauma-informed training for community-based organizations, governments, businesses, and communities.

27. Develop, implement, and evaluate the implementation of the Poverty Solutions Strategy.

- 27.1 Using an Equity and Collective Impact approach, create a cross-sectoral leadership and staff team (governments, community-based organizations, residents and experts by experience, labour, private sector, faith communities, academia, funders, and others) to support activities related to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of poverty-elimination actions.
- 27.2 In collaboration with governments, community-based organizations, experts by experience and other partners, develop monitoring and measuring processes and tools to inform the implementation and evaluation of this Strategy.

28. Engage HRM residents to learn and act to eliminate poverty, racism and stigma.

- 28.1 Develop change management and staff training tools using gender, rural, racial, and health equity lenses in order to promote a poverty sensitive culture.
- 28.2 Champion poverty elimination as a priority to HRM residents, businesses, and all levels of government.

29. Dedicate funding to poverty elimination actions.

- 29.1 Embed mechanisms that assess the impact of budget choices on poverty elimination in business units' and Halifax Regional Council's decision-making processes.
- 29.2 Find new ways to invest in eliminating poverty by exploring sustainable funding options and new revenue tools (ex: dedicating an amount of property tax to a Poverty Elimination Fund).
- 29.3 Prioritize accessibility for marginalized people and communities when designing programs and services.

HALIFAX



United Way
Halifax