



# UNITED IN POVERTY ACTION A COMMUNITY UPDATE

JANUARY 2024







**United Way**  
Halifax

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# INTRODUCTION

In 2018, the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) and United Way Halifax released *Building Poverty Solutions: Ideas for Action*, a community report detailing the state of poverty across the municipality. Since then, United Way Halifax, HRM and the Province of Nova Scotia have been working to implement several poverty solutions proposed in the report. While great strides have been made toward addressing poverty in HRM in recent years, much has changed in our world and our communities since 2018.

The purpose of this updated report is to raise understanding and awareness of the experience of poverty and how it impacts almost every aspect of daily life for those living it. It's also an opportunity to look at what's changed, highlight and acknowledge progress made by a variety of partners, and identify new and continuing barriers. Based on data from the 2021 Canadian Census and various other sources, this report details the poverty landscape in HRM since 2018, taking into account changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, new migration patterns, population growth, a growing housing crisis, rising inflation and costs for basic household needs, and more. As a snapshot of what poverty looks like in HRM today, this report might be distressing to read, but it is intended to provide the data to help inform and drive positive change.

# WHERE WE CAME FROM

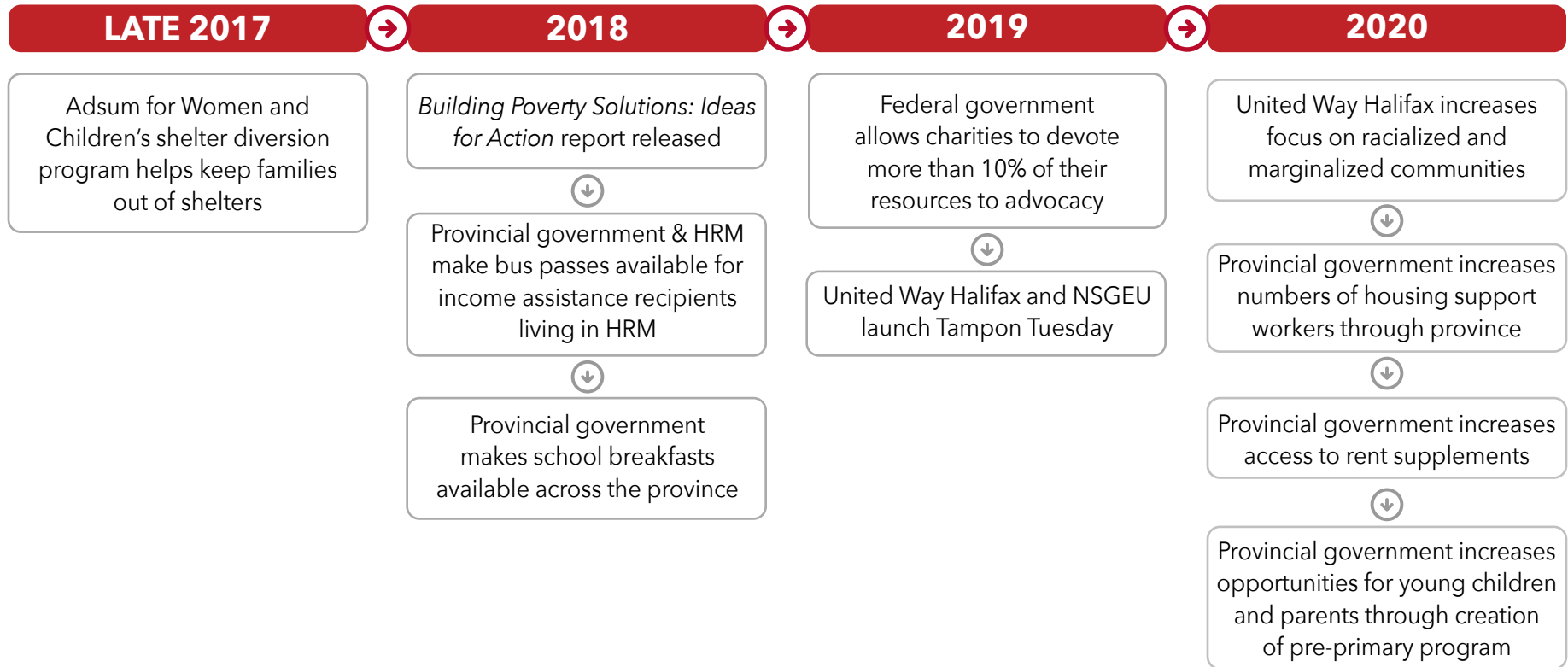
From United Way Halifax's point-of-view, the 2018 poverty report provided critical data that formed the basis of our 3-year strategic plan for impact, *Bridge the Gap by 2025*. It fundamentally changed how we prioritize our work and the types of projects undertaken in our roles as funder, convener, partner, and advocate. The needs it uncovered helped our team to focus on projects that address systemic causes of poverty, like the HRM Community Land Trust project, the East Coast Public Policy Training Institute, and a network of neighbourhood hubs that provide equitable supports and opportunities for-community-by-community. It further led us to prioritize Black- and Indigenous-led organizations for funding and support, where historic and continuing marginalization has created even larger gaps for these communities that must be overcome. It is crucial that work to support community is based on the most up-to-date data, in locations of greatest need, with populations facing the greatest barriers.

Addressing poverty is the responsibility of everyone in every neighbourhood across HRM. We cannot leave it to the nonprofit sector, just as we cannot leave it to any one order of government. We know solutions are best achieved when community organizations, those with lived experience of poverty, other partners and governments work together. By building understanding, we can empower and support community partners to address poverty in HRM together. We hope this report will help inspire collaboration and new solutions. In fact, we're challenging everyone—members of the business community, other community sector organizations, individuals, agencies, institutions, and all orders of government – to step up, get involved, and help create those solutions. Read on for the data to drive the solutions, tools to help at a neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood level, and community measures to ensure we are all moving in the right direction.





# EXAMPLES OF POVERTY SOLUTIONS PROGRESS IN HRM: 2017-2023





## 2021

HRM implements free transit for riders under 12 and low-income transit passes



HRM implements living wages for contractors



United Way Halifax and partners start Community Land Trust project



HRM launches the Affordable Housing Grant, funding three recipients for a total of \$815,245 in its first year.

## 2022

Lowered childcare costs begin with the Canada-wide childcare agreement



Provincial government implements foster care redesign implemented across the province



United Way Halifax, NSCC and Delmore Buddy Daye Learning Institute launch the East Coast Public Policy Training Institute

## 2023

Provincial government announces the creation of 222 new public housing units



Provincial government releases housing strategy

## IN 2019

United Way Halifax and NSGEU partnered to launch Tampon Tuesday to draw attention to the issue of period poverty.

As a result, many organizations across HRM began considering ways to make menstrual products more readily available to those who need them, including Halifax Public Library branches and public HRM buildings.



# POVERTY IN HRM: WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TODAY?

Around the world and in our own backyard, poverty, as measured by income, continues to play one of the most significant roles in influencing the social determinants of health. For all of us, these are the factors that influence our long-term health and wellbeing, including access to education, employment, income security, food security, housing, social inclusion and more. In essence, these are the necessary ingredients that allow us to live a good quality of life. Unfortunately, those living in poverty are often missing or severely lacking one or more of these essential elements.

Across HRM, recent trends including rapidly increasing costs of housing and food threaten our immediate and long-term wellbeing by changing what it takes to meet our basic needs. These issues are currently adding pressure for all of us, but especially for people in our communities who are already at risk of or actively experiencing poverty.

## COMPLEX SITUATION AS A RESULT OF HOUSING LOSS

A Halifax-based neighbourhood hub had been serving a family of five, a husband, wife, and three children. The husband worked construction, his wife was a hairstylist. When the lease on their aging duplex was up, they were unable to find anything within their budget anywhere in HRM. Eventually, they were forced to move elsewhere in the province, leaving behind work opportunities and their support system.

The husband was not able to find work in their new community. Eventually, he came back to Halifax to find work, couch surfing with friends. He found the distance between him and his family to be too much, and once dormant addictions and mental health issues took hold once again. Now without work and without a home in HRM, he'll require much more significant supports.

With a lack of safe, affordable housing options, neighbourhood hubs and resource centres are struggling to support families they've known for years. Having a stable and affordable home is the foundation that people need to thrive.



## SAM'S STORY – RENOVICTION

Sam is a single mother of two beautiful girls, who was renovated three times between 2019 and 2021. Each time they moved it meant putting their belongings in storage, uprooting their lives and looking for a new home.

Trying to find housing was a full-time job for Sam. She spent hours online, looking for anything in her price range, dropping everything to view an apartment that would already have been viewed by several others. She felt unsupported, until she met Darcy, a housing support worker from Welcome Housing. She finally felt like someone cared about her situation.

With his support and guidance, she finally found a permanent home where she and the girls have settled. They are now thriving instead of just surviving.



## PRECARIOUS LIVING IN SPRYFIELD

The staff at Chebucto Connections have noticed an alarming trend: people living on low incomes in the 50-64 age range face a number of barriers and are ineligible for many benefits. They're not old enough to receive the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), Old Age Security (OAS) or access funding, housing and grants for seniors. They may face employment limitations, especially for those working low-wage jobs.

People in this age bracket are in significant need of support, relying on organizations like Chebucto Connections and other neighbourhood hubs to help them get by. Many of those living on income assistance in this age bracket are counting down the days until their 65th birthday, so they can receive the GIC and OAS. For some people, this nearly doubles their income. Even still, with today's high costs for housing, food, medication and transportation, some seniors will still find themselves struggling to get by.

# POVERTY IN HALIFAX: WHO DOES IT IMPACT MOST?

Poverty does not impact everyone equally. We know that some populations are at a higher risk of experiencing poverty than others. These vulnerable populations include those previously involved in the child welfare system, people living with disabilities, single-parent families, newcomers, people living alone, Indigenous peoples, the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, African Nova Scotians, racialized people and others.

Within these populations, many individuals are living with more than one identity (ex: female, single-parent, African Nova Scotian, and has a disability). Multiple intersecting identities, such as race, class, and gender compound to create interrelated and inextricable experiences, discrimination, and poverty.

There is currently growing concern about the rise in anti-trans and anti-LGBTQ policies locally, in other Canadian provinces and around the world. Of the 498,000 media stories in Canada about the 2SLGBTQIA+ community from January to October 2023, 44.2% were considered to be negative. Additionally, local protests that focus on limiting expression of gender identity in the classroom have been on the rise. This discrimination of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community will likely lead to more barriers to housing and employment opportunities, and an increase in mental health supports needed, leading to a higher likelihood of poverty.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Between 2016-2021, **visible minorities increased** in the Halifax County Metropolitan Area (CMA) **by 54%**.

**37% of Nova Scotians have a disability**, which is the highest rate of disability in Canada.

**In 2022**, an unattached single person with a **disability on income assistance** had a total income of only **\$12,687** - **just 48%** of the Market Basket Measure (MBM) poverty line.

**Nearly 1/3 of households** in Halifax are single-person households.

In 2021, **18,850** people in the Halifax CMA identified as **Indigenous**.

In 2021, the **poverty rate** for visible minorities in Halifax was **23.4%**, more than double the average poverty rate across the city.

Youth who were previously involved in the Child Welfare System made up **49%** of the **youth experiencing homelessness** in the latest *Point in Time Count*.



# POVERTY IN HALIFAX: WHO DOES IT IMPACT MOST?

## RISING VULNERABILITY IN 2SLGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY

In 2023, acts of mischief and protests caused significant harm towards the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. In April, students at Bay View High School in Upper Tantallon were alarmed and hurt when their pride flag was taken down, brought outside and burned. The students and staff rallied together though, with signs promoting inclusivity and kindness and rainbow clothing. In addition, the school staff, student council and gender and sexuality alliance club held consultations with students to ensure both physical and emotional safety.

In September, the group 1MillionMarch4Children organized rallies across the country, advocating for the "elimination of the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) curriculum, pronouns, gender ideology and mixed bathrooms in schools." In an effort to protect trans children, their right to express their identity and their right to safety, a strong and vocal counter-protest was organized. Queer allies joined the protest, and many politicians, unions, businesses and individuals released statements in support of an inclusive community where everyone deserves love - no matter their gender or sexuality.





## UNDERSTANDING AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN EXPERIENCES

For over 400 years, African Nova Scotian communities have been contributing to the cultural, economic, educational, and artistic landscape of this province while facing immense racism, discrimination, and prejudice. Much of this report relies on data collected through Statistics Canada. This data shows differences in income, education and home ownership for Black Nova Scotians compared to the whole population. However, it does not identify barriers or opportunities that are unique to African Nova Scotians – many who have been displaced from their traditional neighbourhoods and communities, or who face barriers to good employment or education.

United Way Halifax acknowledges that truly understanding the depth of African Nova Scotian experiences deserves significant, ongoing consultation and collaboration. While we have begun to change our practices to fund more equitability, we are not currently in a position to report on the specific needs of African Nova Scotian communities. However, we will continue to build upon and deepen relationships within communities, collaborate with local African Nova Scotian led and serving organizations, and advocate for public policy to create a more equitable and fair environment for African Nova Scotian communities.

# POVERTY IN HRM: WHERE DOES IT IMPACT?

Just as poverty varies from province to province, poverty looks different across communities. Throughout HRM, some neighbourhoods are more vulnerable to poverty than others, and show vast differences on many of the social determinants of health and long-term wellbeing.

Communities with a higher incidence of low incomes, low education levels and low employment, combined with a higher proportion of persons experiencing vulnerabilities, are considered priority neighbourhoods for United Way Halifax. We have developed two composite indicators – one for socioeconomic status and one for social wellness opportunity – to help understand which neighbourhoods could benefit from additional support.

We're currently in the process of creating profiles for 70 neighbourhoods in the Halifax County Metropolitan Area (CMA), using census data and our composite indicators. We also had population profiles developed based on census data in the same CMA, including priority groups such as single parents, children, seniors, and Black and Indigenous Nova Scotians. We will be making these profiles available to community partners in need of data once they are complete. Some examples of what we've learned so far are:



**Eight communities have 18-30%** of the population below the MBM poverty line compared to **10.4% in Halifax CMA**



**Childhood poverty and vulnerability** is extremely high in some neighbourhoods



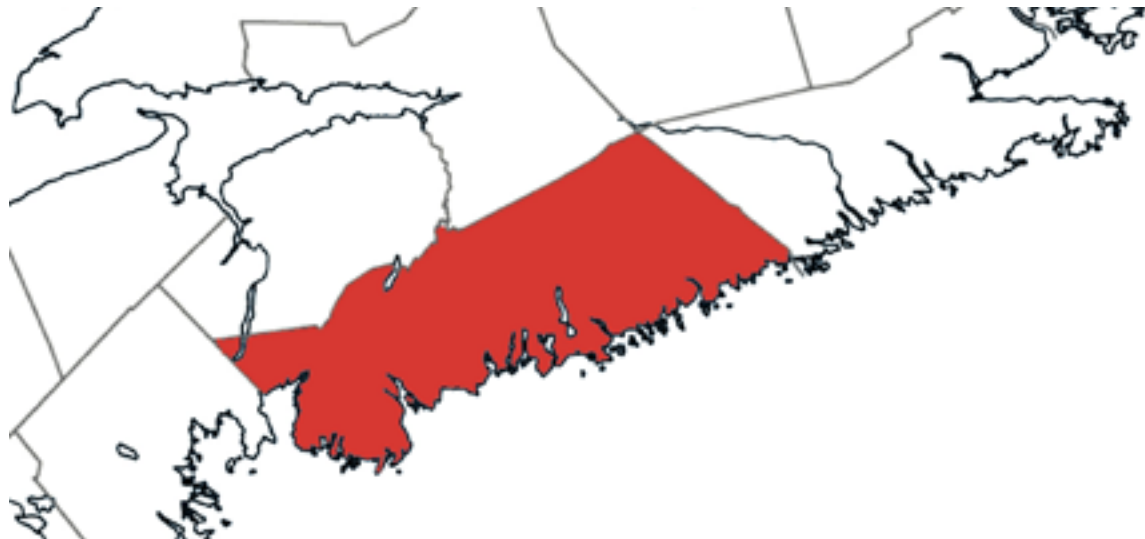
The **percentage of renters in six vulnerable neighbourhoods is 62-87%** while the Halifax CMA average is 41%



**Compared to homeowners at 5%**, there is a much higher percentage of renters in **core housing need at 22%** for Halifax CMA



Nine neighbourhoods have renters with **core housing need from 30 to 38%**





## SUCCESS STORY: THE NORTH GROVE

Dartmouth North was a priority neighbourhood identified in the *Building Poverty Solutions* report. The diverse neighbourhood most known for its affordable rental units was suffering from high rates of poverty and a lack of connection.

The North Grove is a neighbourhood hub in Dartmouth North that uses food, their urban farm and children's programming to bring people together. Although the food centre has operated for ten years and the family centre has run programming for 30 years, they've more recently hit their stride as the two sides of the organization came together under one roof. Many people come to their organization for nutritious and affordable food, but they stay because they feel like they belong. Parents come for the high-quality parenting programs and stay for the friendships and connection.

Last year, The North Grove provided 44,212 healthy meals and snacks and had 408 children and parents in their parenting programs. The North Grove is a critical hub that's helping the neighbourhood build resilience and thrive.

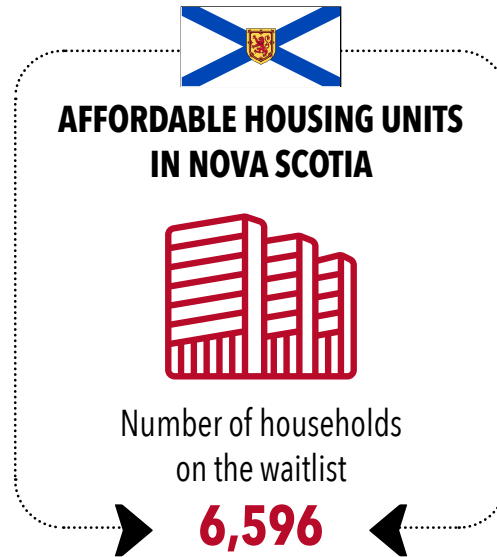


# POVERTY IN HRM: WHAT HAS CHANGED?

## HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Ensuring that people have access to secure and affordable housing creates the ideal conditions for them to lead good lives and fully participate in our communities. However, it is becoming more difficult for residents in HRM to afford a place to call home.

Real estate prices have seen a significant increase in recent years, and this trend is reflected in the rental market. We have also seen a growing trend in renovations and fixed-term leases. Some landlords are removing existing tenants and replacing them with new tenants, enabling them to get around the 2% rent cap and charge higher rental rates. A growing population in HRM has also made affordable housing more difficult to secure, with an increase in international immigration, international students and temporary foreign workers, and larger numbers of people moving to Nova Scotia from other Canadian provinces. With all of these factors, access to affordable housing is becoming more challenging, reaching a crisis in HRM and resulting in a rising number of people experiencing homelessness.





## DID YOU KNOW?

Nearly half the applicants to the **public housing waitlist** in Nova Scotia are **seniors**.

As of October 2022, the **average cost** to rent a 2-bedroom in Halifax was **\$1,449**.

Nearly **10%** of homes listed for sale in August 2023 in HRM were priced at over **\$1M**.

The **vacancy rate** in Halifax was **1%** in both 2021 and 2022 and was less than **0.6%** for the most affordable units.

Based on recently released population estimates, the population of HRM increased by **4.5%** in 2022, reaching a total of **480,582 residents**.

In 2022, Halifax ranked in the **top two fastest-growing urban regions** in Canada.

Black and Indigenous people are overrepresented amongst the homeless population. In October 2023, **Indigenous** peoples made up **23%** of those actively homeless in HRM, while those of **African** descent made up **13%** of the homeless population. These numbers fluctuate and likely do not represent all of the Black and Indigenous people experiencing homelessness.

Racialized and marginalized individuals have **lower rates of home ownership** than the rest of the population. These populations experience additional barriers to home ownership due to **historic inequities** including discriminatory lending policies, forced community relocation, inherited versus titled land, and a lack of generational wealth. Notably, this is an area that United Way Halifax would like to monitor more closely in future.



“Economic hardship is a reality the Mi’kmaq and all Indigenous peoples have lived and struggled with for many generations, largely as a result of the colonial legacies that embedded discriminatory practices in Canadian institutions. In recent years however, we have seen a dramatic shift in the demographics and escalation of housing demands. Prior to the pandemic, the Mi’kmaq Native Friendship Centre had no-one on a waiting list for affordable, safe housing. Post pandemic it’s been growing steadily, and we now have over 100.”

*Pam Glode-Desrochers, Executive Director,  
Mi’kmaq Native Friendship Centre, Halifax*

*Excerpt from 2023 Canadian Conference to End Homelessness  
panel discussion, November 2023*



Image: [fathomstudio.ca](http://fathomstudio.ca)

"From a cultural point of view, I also think it's important to recognize there is no word in the Mi'kmaw language for "homelessness". Mi'kmaw Elders often outline the need to think in terms of "seven generations". As we're developing answers to the growing housing needs and current homelessness crisis, we should be asking ourselves how we can do things differently

moving forward. If seven generations ago we were all thinking about housing over the long-term horizon – applying a seven generations planning outlook – we wouldn't be in the position we're in today, seven generations later!"



### INDIVIDUALS ACTIVELY EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN NOVA SCOTIA

December 2019 . . . .	<b>269</b>	▲
December 2021 . . . .	<b>467</b>	▲
February 2023 . . . . .	<b>835</b>	▲
December 2023 . .	<b>1,082</b>	▲

“It is critical to recognize there is no clear picture of the prevalence of African Nova Scotian people who are currently homeless – and the reason for this is very much seated in our culture and community practices. Our community's historical context is we do not put our members into shelters or out on the street – we may have 10 people in one house, but we take care of our own. This means the numbers of African Nova Scotia people experiencing homelessness is far higher than any official list or registry shows, and the increasing needs mean this is becoming more of a struggle to manage. That doesn't mean we're asking for a hand-out, it means we're expecting to be given the opportunity to build on our own lands, to bring our children and dependents back home, and to see follow-through on the promises made to us when we were displaced years ago. As a community, collectively we help ourselves, we know what we need, and we're at the point now where we will be demanding for that delivery.”

*Bernadette Hamilton-Reid, African Nova Scotian Decade for People of African Descent Coalition  
Excerpt from 2023 Canadian Conference to End Homelessness panel discussion, November 2023*

## LONELINESS AND SOCIAL CONNECTION

Loneliness and social connection became more important than ever in 2020, when the pandemic began and people were mandated to stay home. This was challenging for many of us, but especially for those who had very limited access to internet and online supports. United Way Halifax provided many organizations across our community with funding to provide devices and online access to people living in poverty who couldn't afford access. This became even more necessary when many government services moved online permanently.

However, even as many programs have returned to in-person, people are struggling with loneliness and a lack of connection. Recently, U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy released a new Surgeon General Advisory calling attention to the public health crisis of loneliness, isolation, and lack of connection. In the advisory, he compared the health complications from loneliness to the equivalent of smoking tobacco daily. And, there are other implications: loneliness and isolation contributes to poor mental health, and increase the risk of depression and anxiety, especially when experienced in childhood. In fact, the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared loneliness to be a pressing global health threat and has launched an international commission on the problem, to be led by Dr. Murthy.

Poverty contributes to isolation, as those without adequate income often miss out on social opportunities with family or friends. Many of United Way's funded programs address social isolation, and in addition to improving mental health and overall wellness, participants often end up building long-term friendships. This helps build resiliency, problem solving skills and more.

# LIFE-CHANGING SOCIAL PROGRAMMING

Brooks Field is a regular participant at Spencer House, a seniors centre in south-end Halifax that focuses on bringing people together and improving health and wellbeing for seniors. When Brooks first moved to Halifax, she didn't know anyone. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and she found herself totally alone and very depressed. "It was so different from my previous life where I was very active. It got to the point where it was hard to get up in the morning." When a new neighbour moved in and mentioned Spencer House, Brooks decided to check it out. Since then, things have turned around. "There's always something going on here, I've met lots of people and I've made a very good friend." She speaks positively about Spencer House everywhere she goes, and her friends and family have remarked they've never seen another place like it. "It's changed my life."



# FOOD INSECURITY

In recent years, more Canadians are reporting that consumer inflation is affecting their ability to manage day-to-day expenses, including the rising costs of food. According to Feed Nova Scotia, the year 2022 saw a concerning rise in food insecurity, affecting a significant portion of residents in HRM. This upward trend is evident in the increased number of people living in food-insecure households, and who need support from local food banks.

It is also important to note that income plays a significant role in food security. In 2019, Halifax had a food insecurity rate of 20.7%. In 2020, many families and individuals living on a low income saw their income increase with CERB during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Food insecurity in 2020 dropped to 15.5%. However, in 2021 when CERB was no longer available and incomes decreased, food insecurity jumped back to 20.5%. Nova Scotia's provincial food insecurity rate is the second highest in the country, at 22%.



“Every year we have seen an increase in the number of persons reaching out to the food bank for the first time. However, there has been a significant increase by nearly 45% this year, and many asking for help are income-receiving households. It has been hard for families with no, low- and fixed-incomes, coupled with inflation, there has been so many natural disasters and tragedies, increases in utilities and overall the cost of living, families have been forced to re-budget and re-allocate as much money as possible to rent, medications and other key areas for their family's survival. In August 2023 for example, there were over 300 new registrations, and many were from households with at least one fixed income, making a total of over 13,000 food boxes distributed in fiscal 2023.”

*Denise Daley, Executive Director,  
Parker Street Food & Furniture Bank*



## DID YOU KNOW?

**Over 200,000 Nova Scotians** were living in food-insecure households in 2022.

In **March 2022, 29,857 Nova Scotians** accessed food banks, a **17% increase from 2019**.

In **2022, food prices** in Nova Scotia saw an **increase of 10% from the previous year**.



**33% of Atlantic Canadians**

say that rising costs are affecting their ability to meet their basic needs.



# SECTOR CAPACITY

Nova Scotia has the highest provincial poverty rate in the country, which means individuals and families are relying on community programs and organizations for support now more than ever. This comes at a difficult time when the social sector is also facing inflation, affordability challenges, and the results of pandemic pressures. The social sector is also facing staffing and training challenges due to the difficult work and the impact of the affordability crisis. In some cases, staff are living in housing that is not affordable and facing some of the same issues as their clients.

In addition, the sector often faces many barriers to securing operational (i.e. core) funding. Many government programs focus on funding specific programs, but not the basics of what nonprofits and charities need to be able to operate. This includes things like rent and electricity, but increasingly includes things that are essential to operate in a more virtual world. Without investment in software, safety mechanisms and training, nonprofits are susceptible to cyber security risks, which threaten their reputation, their donors' data and potentially government funding.

When government funding is inadequate or piecemeal, nonprofit organizations need to fundraise to cover these important costs. Fundraising has become more challenging since the COVID-19 pandemic, with fewer individuals giving

across the country. There is also federal legislation in the works that removes tax benefits for some forms of donations, making it harder to attract large gifts to fill funding gaps.

Nationally, Imagine Canada is advocating for core funding and a home in government for the nonprofit sector. The social sector is essential to Canada's social safety net, and yet, the needs of the sector are often not considered in government decision making. A home in government could ensure the sector's voice is heard more frequently, and core funding would help nonprofits focus on delivering essential and life-saving programs and services.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Annual operating budgets within the nonprofit sector are **decreasing** and in a **downward trend**

**1/3 of nonprofit organizations** in Nova Scotia don't have a contingency fund in place for unforeseen expenses

Social services make up **11%** of nonprofit organizations in Nova Scotia

# WORKING TOGETHER FOR IMPACT

The Nova Scotia Nonprofit Coalition formed in 2020 to help nonprofit, voluntary, and not for profit social enterprise organizations navigate the pandemic and continue to be able to effectively meet the needs of Nova Scotians impacted by COVID-19. As the group worked together it also began to see its longer-term potential to inspire ideas for strengthening the sector's impact beyond the pandemic.

The Coalition has since broadened its focus to collectively advance the importance of the Community Impact Sector to Nova Scotia. In the fall of 2022, the Coalition identified three priorities for its work: shaping public policy, championing a strategy for a well-resourced sector, and securing a respected seat at all tables for nonprofit sector voices. The Coalition is working on a strategy to move these priorities together and is expecting to launch this plan at the Nova Scotia Nonprofit Day of Recognition in the spring of 2024.

# CLIMATE CHANGE & ENERGY POVERTY

The effects of climate change in Nova Scotia include drought, severe storms, heavy rainfall, and high temperatures. These risks impact our quality of life. A report prepared for Nova Scotia Environment and Climate Change states that individuals and communities already facing systemic inequities, such as racialized and marginalized groups, tend to be more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. These dramatic and devastating effects can also push those living on the edge into poverty.

For many residents, making changes to their home to make it more energy efficient would help with cost savings. For example, better insulation and heat pumps make a huge difference for those previously relying on expensive heating oil. But the up-front investment is costly, and out of reach for some. Those who don't own their home face additional barriers.

Rob Harris, vice president of program delivery and operations at Clean Foundation, has spent many days going into people's homes to conduct energy audits. He recently remarked that homes often look normal from the outside, but once you're inside, you can see how precariously people live, often on the edge of poverty.

The Oil to Heat Pump Affordability Program will help many Nova Scotians move from oil heat to a heat pump, covering up to \$10,000 in costs including costs to upgrade electrical panels and to remove the oil tank. But costs can run much higher, especially in a province where low-quality housing leaves residents plagued with moisture issues, improper wiring and poor insulation.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Atlantic Canadians spend more on **electricity and shelter fuels** relative to the rest of the country.

Atlantic Canada's households use a mix of electric, wood, wood pellet, and oil-fired heating due primarily to the **region's sparse population**, which has limited the adoption of natural gas throughout the region.

Through social energy equity programs, Clean Foundation conducted **315** energy audits in 2022, resulting in **8,465 gigajoules (GJ)** of energy savings.

As of June 2023, nearly **4.5 million hectares of forest** has burned in Canada – an area the size of mainland Nova Scotia.

A 2020 World Bank report estimated an additional **68 to 135 million people** could be pushed into poverty by 2030 because of climate change.

# POVERTY MEASURES



## THE MARKET BASKET MEASURE

Adopted by the federal government in 2019 as Canada’s official poverty measure, the Market Basket Measure (MBM) represents the cost of a “basket” of goods and services required to meet a family’s basic needs. Based on a family of two adults and two children, the Market Basket Measure includes everyday necessities such as food, clothing, shelter and transportation.

In 2020, the Market Basket Measure required for a family to meet their basic needs in HRM was \$46,527 annually. At the time, over 10% of households in HRM were not able to meet this basic threshold, meaning more than one in every 10 households in HRM fell below Canada’s official poverty line. Since then, the MBM threshold in Halifax has jumped dramatically, to \$52,439 in 2022. Cost increases from 2020 to 2022 in housing by 12%, food by 13%, and transportation by 23% are reflected in this large increase. It’s also notable that in 2021, incomes were artificially inflated due to the impact of CERB, meaning the current poverty rate will be higher than the 10% in 2020.

### Market Basket Measure 2020 to 2022

2020	2021	2022
\$46,527	\$48,263	\$52,439

# CORE HOUSING NEED

Across Canada, people in “core housing need” are those currently experiencing at least one of three conditions: a lack of safe housing, affordable housing or adequate housing. Compared to homeowners, renters are more likely to fall into this category. Given that HRM has a large number of renters compared to the national average, this means that many in our region are vulnerable. According to the 2021 Canadian Census, 22% percent of renters in the Halifax Metropolitan Area were in core housing need, meaning their housing wasn't affordable, safe or appropriate for the number of family members. Given that homelessness in our region has increased significantly since 2021, this number has likely increased, with increasing numbers of renovictions, fixed-term leases favouring new tenants at higher rents, and record low vacancy rates.

While core housing need is an important measure, it doesn't tell the whole story of who is in need of housing. Core housing need does not consider people living in temporary situations, such as students, temporary foreign workers, people living in transitional housing, people staying with friends or family while looking for a home, or people who are incarcerated and on remand.

A recent report looking at Canada's housing supply needs from a human-rights approach recommended drastically increasing units that are affordable for the two lowest income deciles. The report, commissioned by Canada's National Housing Advocate, recognizes a need for 4.3 million new or acquired subsidized and preferably non-market homes over the next decade that rent for less than \$1,050 per month, adjusted for inflation. This would support the very-low and low-income earners who are in the greatest need for affordable housing.

At United Way Halifax, we believe that access to safe and affordable housing is a basic right for everyone in our community.



## A SNAPSHOT OF POVERTY & SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH INDICATORS: HALIFAX METROPOLITAN AREA

### Housing

75,000 households in the Halifax area are living in unaffordable housing, spending more than 30% of their income on shelter costs.  
Source: 2021 census

Rental households are 4X more likely to be in core housing need compared to owner households.  
Source: 2021 Canadian Census

### Food Security

The average household food insecurity rate in HRM was recently reported at 20.5%  
National average: 18%  
Source: Halifax Food Policy Alliance

22% of Nova Scotians were living in food-insecure households in 2022  
Source: Feed NS

In 2020, many low-income households saw an increase in income due to CERB and other COVID-19-related benefits. Now, a few years later, we are able to see some of the benefits of these additional income benefits. The percentage of those experiencing food insecurity dropped to 15.5 per cent in 2020. It has since increased to 2019 levels. Being food secure means being able to access nutritious, affordable and culturally appropriate food. It is not only an important factor in the overall social determinants of health and wellbeing; it also contributes to better physical health.

## POLICY CHANGES

Since the *Building Poverty Solutions: Ideas for Action* report was released in 2018, several key policy changes have positively impacted our communities:

- The Canada Child Benefit, which provides tax-free support to low and middle-income families with children, became indexed to inflation in 2018. Based on income, this benefit provides up to \$6,275 per child aged 6-17, and up to \$7,437 per child under 6.
- The COVID-19 Economic Response Benefit (CERB) provided income support for those who were unable to work during the early days of the pandemic. Providing \$2,000 biweekly, this helped lift some people out of poverty in 2020-21, as they were entitled to more money than low-wage work would have provided. We anticipate that poverty numbers will be higher in the next census.
- In July 2023, the federal government's Rapid Housing Initiative announced \$11M in funding for 36 new affordable housing units in Halifax.
- A 2% rent cap was introduced in Nova Scotia in December 2020 and is in place until the end of 2023. This cap restricts landlords from raising rents by more than 2% per year, and is intended to protect tenants against dramatic rent hikes.



- In 2021, Halifax Transit began offering free annual bus passes to eligible Income Assistance clients in HRM. This initiative allows individuals and families to save on transportation costs and access more community resources.
  - HRM's Public Safety Business Unit was created in early 2023, formally bringing together all those working to address housing and homelessness, food security, and public safety outside of policing and adding additional necessary resources.
- and bus and ferry terminals. In addition, United Way's Menstrual May and Tampon Tuesday initiatives have put well over 100,000 products into the hands of those who need them.
- Halifax Public Libraries made menstrual products available for free in their public bathrooms in July 2019, and HRM followed this policy as of December 2020 for its municipal recreation facilities, community centres,

# CANADA CHILD BENEFIT - A VITAL INCOME SUPPLEMENT

The impacts of poverty follow children throughout their lives. Poverty limits opportunities for children, which can often impact their education and their ability to secure stable and well-compensated employment as adults. With a goal of reducing child poverty, the federal government implemented the Canada Child Benefit in 2016 to support low to mid-income families struggling with the costs of raising children. It has been indexed since 2018 to protect families from inflationary pressures and provide predictable support.

The benefit has become extremely important for families dealing with the rising costs of housing, food and other basic needs. Chebucto Family Centre, a local family resource centre, shared a story of a family who was depending on the CCB to help cover the cost of their rent. When the children were temporarily removed from the home by child protective services, the parents worked hard with social services to improve their situation so the children could return to a safe and welcoming environment. But without their children at home, they were no longer eligible for CCB. Without it, they fell behind on rent, putting them in a precarious position and facing eviction when the children returned home.

This story underscores the importance of an adequate income to help people today and to ensure brighter futures for children.



“The Canada Child Benefit supports the wellbeing of children and helps to ensure families have funds to provide safe housing and food for children”

*Sharelyn Stone, Executive Director, Chebucto Family Centre*

# MEASUREMENTS AND DATA – HOW WE USE THEM

The data in this report helps United Way Halifax make good decisions on where and when to invest donor dollars in programming. It helps us determine where our advocacy efforts should be focused. It's also the foundation for solutions to poverty. Our intention is to share this report widely to support our partners and governments to make wise decisions on what solutions are likely to be most effective, where they should be implemented and how to evaluate their success.

As part of the evaluation of our efforts, we have identified specific measures for our own work. We collect data annually from programs and projects where we have a direct role and will continue to report publicly on the impacts. We have also identified 11 community level measures and conditions that our work, and that of others, will contribute to changing over time. It will take concerted effort from community organizations, governments and businesses to see positive movement in these measures over time.

In addition to measuring these for an updated formal report in five years' time, we are also committed to sharing status updates as part of our annual public reporting, providing additional anecdotal and qualitative data where possible.

Here is where the hard work comes in. United Way Halifax is challenging all members of the business community, other community sector organizations, individuals, agencies, institutions, and all orders of government – to step up, get involved, and help create those solutions. You won't be alone. We're committed to our leadership in these areas. Read more below and consider how you or your organization can influence these measurements over time.

## COMMUNITY LEVEL CONDITIONS AND MEASURES

This is how collectively we know we're moving in the right direction to address poverty

### DESIRED SITUATION

#### Growing poverty awareness and buy-in by general public

*Measured by:*

- Net change in percentage of public awareness that poverty is caused by systemic issues & adequately addressing means tackling the systemic issues – as measured by Narrative Research's East Coast Voice survey questions every 6 months.
- Net change in percentage of public buy-in that they have a role to play in tackling systemic issues that contribute to poverty - as measured by Narrative Research's East Coast Voice survey questions every 6 months.

### DESIRED SITUATION

#### Ensuring equitable housing and homelessness supports

*Measured by:*

- Net change in homelessness – measured through the By Name list.
- Net change in homelessness in Black Nova Scotian and Indigenous populations – measured through the By Name list
- Net change in those living in core housing need – measured through CMHC and Population Group Profiles (PGP)

### DESIRED SITUATION

#### Addressing the widening gap for people in vulnerable circumstances

*Measured by:*

- Net change in household food insecurity rates – measured by Canadian Community Health Survey
- Net change in poverty rate in priority neighbourhoods – measured by MBM

### DESIRED SITUATION

#### Enabling equitable economic recovery (or health) and inclusive growth

*Measured by:*

- Net change in income disparity by neighborhood and target group profile – measured by PGP and percentage of people in the bottom 3 deciles of after-tax income.
- Net change in homeownership among marginalized and racialized groups – measured through PGP.
- Net change in rates of education within marginalized and racialized communities – measured through PGP
- Net change in rates of employment within marginalized and racialized communities – measured through PGP

# POVERTY IN HRM: WHERE TO FROM HERE?

The statistics presented in this report, coupled with the anecdotal realities experienced since 2022, paint a highly concerning picture of poverty in HRM. It is easy to feel overwhelmed. It's hard to see how individual actions by residents or organizations could make a real difference.

“When you're part of a society with an increasing poverty rate and you can see more and more of your fellow citizens suffering, it's really hard to not be a part of that or be impacted by it. It changes the outcome, from striving to surviving.”

“Not knowing how to get involved – I think a lot of times people see it as a systemic issue and one person as an individual can't make a difference because they don't see themselves making an impact on a large scale.”

*Comments collected during online focus groups conducted by Narrative Research for United Way Halifax, October 2023*

At United Way Halifax, we have hope. Every day and every week, we see the kind of impact even a small action can have on those most vulnerable in our society. When actions and efforts are directed at the areas of greatest need – areas identified through research, data, and by listening to community – we can make things better. A great example is through the United Way Halifax Wildfire Recovery Appeal; in less than two weeks, we raised over a million dollars. By partnering with community organizations and staying in touch with local governments in HRM and Shelburne, we were able to support thousands of people in a short period of time. Most importantly, when HRM communities, non-profits, all orders of government, and the business community work together – we make great things happen. Every. Time.

Making progress toward a better HRM comes down to: **good policy, income, equity, and human rights.**

A focus on **human rights** means every person has value. Human rights are the rights to which persons are inherently entitled because they are human beings, like safe, adequate housing, nutritious food, medical care and necessary social services. “Human rights” describes how we instinctively expect to be treated as people. It recognizes the need for freedom to make choices about our lives and develop our potential. It prioritizes life free from fear, harassment, and discrimination.

Consistently applying a deliberate **equity** lens means we are analyzing the impact of policies and systems on under-served and marginalized individuals and groups, which leads to solutions that identify and eliminate barriers and hopefully prevent the same circumstances that created the inequity in the first place.





We must focus on closing the growing income disparity gap to improve poverty in HRM. The gap between this country's rich and poor is growing at record speed. The wealthiest 20% of Canadian households controlled almost 68% of the total net worth in Canada in the first part of 2023, while the least wealthy 40% accounted for only 2.7% of net worth. This means we must prioritize those in the greatest need. The incomes of households at the lowest end of the spectrum may increase, but if household incomes increase by the same proportion across all income levels, poverty rates will remain the same. This is not a situation where a rising tide lifts all boats.

We've also seen over the past few years how good public policy can make a difference in the poverty picture overall. The Child Tax Benefit, a provincial rent cap, free transit passes for eligible Income Assistance clients – these are all examples of public policies that made an appreciable difference for vulnerable people in our city and province. **Good public policy** must fundamentally address human rights, be developed with an equity lens, and focus on decreasing income disparity. And when policy changes improve the poverty outlook, we need to ensure those policies stay in place for the long term.

United Way Halifax is committed to positive change. Our last poverty report fundamentally changed our work in community; it directed where we focused our efforts and funding, and what projects we pursued to address the more systemic issues that lead to poverty. Our knowledge about community gaps and needs, as updated in this report, will continue to inform what we do.

We don't achieve anything alone. We bring donors, volunteers, community organizations, businesses, and governments together. We do this every day, in every way we can. Everyone has a role to play in creating an inclusive, brighter future for our community.

## UWH BUSINESS PLAN PRIORITIES

Through our 3-Year Strategic Plan, as well as our annual Business Plan Priorities, the team at United Way Halifax is leaning in to these four areas in the following ways

### GOOD POLICY

- ➔ East Coast Public Policy Training Institute – Build non-profit capacity related to policy advocacy, development, and change
- ➔ Public Policy Funding for non-profit organizations – Provide funding for non-profit organizations to work on advocacy and public policy
- ➔ Advocate for community sector capacity and support – along with other members of the Nova Scotia Nonprofit Coalition – focusing on shaping public policy, championing a strategy for a well-resourced sector, and securing a respected seat at all tables for nonprofit sector voices

### HUMAN RIGHTS

- ➔ Fund agencies providing programming needed in neighbourhoods focused on nutritious and culturally-appropriate food, safe and affordable housing and shelter, mental health and social inclusion – preferably through systemic, long-term solutions
- ➔ Operationalize the HRM Community Land Trust project –with a focus on equity & informed by lived experience

### INCOME

- ➔ Advocate for policies to close the growing income disparity gap – prioritizing those in the greatest need
- ➔ Secure designated funding and continue to facilitate the growing network of neighbourhood hubs / resource centres

### EQUITY

- ➔ Advocate and fundraise to prioritize vulnerable residents during climate change and other environmental crises by establishing a Climate Crisis Relief Fund
- ➔ Increase overall investment in Black-led/serving and Indigenous-led/serving organizations, year over year
- ➔ Advocate to ensure lived experience informs the development of programs and services for those living in poverty
- ➔ Learn, listen and change every day along our diversity, equity, and inclusion journey

# COMMUNITY LEVEL CONDITIONS & MEASURES – EXAMPLES OF BASELINE MEASURES

Net change in homelessness - **1,082 people** in December 2023



Net change in homelessness in Black Nova Scotian and Indigenous populations - **238** identified as Indigenous and **135** identified as African Descent in October 2023



Net change in those living in core housing need - **22%** of renters in core housing need in 2021 census

Net change in household food insecurity rates - In 2021, **20.5%** of households in HRM were food insecure.



Net change in poverty rate in priority neighbourhoods - measured by Market Basket Measure (MBM) - **Eight** communities have **18-30%** of the population below the MBM compared to **10.4%** in Halifax CMA

Net change in homeownership among marginalized and racialized groups - **42%-57%** of individuals in five marginalized or racialized populations own their home, compared to **65%** of the overall population



Net change in rates of education within marginalized and racialized communities - e.g. Two racialized communities and two marginalized communities have **20.2%-27.3%** of their population with a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to **32.6%** of the general population of the Halifax CMA



Net change in rates of employment within marginalized and racialized communities - e.g. Four racialized communities and two marginalized communities have employment rates of **42.1%-55.7%** while the general population has an employment rate of **58%**

Net change in income disparity by neighborhood and target group profile - e.g. **Nine of 65** communities have more than **50% of Economic families\*** with after-tax income in the lowest three deciles (less than \$34,700). Six communities have more than **40% of Economic families\*** with after-tax family income in the highest three deciles (more than \$79,200).

\*Economic Families and persons not in Economic Families



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