

**Subject: Ottawa's Poverty Reduction Strategy 2025 - 2029**

**File Number: ACS2024-CSS-GEN-010**

**Report to Community Services Committee on 22 October 2024**

**and Council 30 October 2024**

**Submitted on October 11, 2024 by Clara Freire, General Manager - Community  
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**Ward: Citywide**

**Objet : Stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté d'Ottawa 2025-2029**

**Numéro de dossier : ACS2024-CSS-GEN-010**

**Rapport présenté au Comité des services communautaires**

**Rapport soumis le 22 octobre 2024**

**et au Conseil le 30 octobre 2024**

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**Quartier : À l'échelle de la ville**

## **REPORT RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**That Community Services Committee recommend that Council approve the Poverty Reduction Strategy as outlined in this report and supporting documentation therein to achieve the first step in the Term of Council strategic objective “advance poverty reduction.”**

## **RECOMMANDATION(S) DU RAPPORT**

**Que le Comité des services communautaires recommande au Conseil d’approuver la Stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté exposée dans le présent rapport et les documents à l’appui qu’il renferme afin de franchir la première étape de l’objectif stratégique du mandat du Conseil, qui consiste à « poursuivre la lutte contre la pauvreté ».**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

On October 27, 2021, City Council approved the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan ([ACS2021-EPS-PPD-0003](#)). The Community Safety and Well-Being Plan (CSWB Plan) is both a foundational strategy and a long-term journey intended to address the most pressing risk factors to community safety and well-being issues as well as plan for future needs. One of the identified priorities emerging from this plan is financial security and poverty reduction.

The City of Ottawa is uniquely positioned to facilitate the development and implementation of the Strategy using a collective impact approach. As a collective, the City and partners will: identify shared priorities, develop measurable actions, engage in mutually reinforcing activities, mobilize relevant resources, and engage the broader community, including people who have lived and living experience of poverty.

Poverty alleviation requires concrete actions and resources to persons living in poverty to make decisions about their well-being. Evidence shows that through a collective impact approach, complex social change such as poverty reduction can be achieved through increasing leadership capacity among partners to carry out backbone functions, establishing equity-focused targets, including those with data expertise in backbones, and cross-sector representation.

In 2021, through Tamarack Institute’s Cities Ending Poverty initiative, the Coalition of Community Health and Resources Centers, Ottawa Community Food Partnership, and Ottawa Food Bank established a partnership to begin the development of an Ottawa Poverty Reduction Strategy. By 2022, these partners came together to facilitate the

development of Ottawa's Strategy. By April 2023, the CSWB Office established an Advisory Group with membership from multiple sectors to guide and oversee the Strategy.

As a result of extensive resident and stakeholder engagement, data reviews, and expert engagement, the Strategy is now formed of five strategic pillars (food security, employment, financial security, economic development, and integrated and simplified pathways), 10 priorities and 26 sub-priorities.

Short-term actions for 2025-2026 were identified as follows to be completed within existing budgets and/or City staffing:

- Hold a community-led Food Security Forum in 2025 in partnership with the food sector.
- Establish a City working group to coordinate efforts and enhance a food security lens in City plans and strategies.
- Increase funding to mentorship programs for Indigenous, Black & racialized and newcomer youth.
- Coordination of income and employment security measures inter-departmentally.
- Assess Ottawa's labour market and identify workforce needs and opportunities as part of the City's Economic Development Strategy.

Short-term actions for 2024-2025 that require new investments which will be considered as part of the 2025 City Budget process:

- Provide backbone support and one-time funding for tax-clinic coordination where individuals and families are most in need. In addition, efforts will be undertaken to find a sustainable solution to tax clinic coordination in partnership with community agencies and private sector partners.

The Strategy highlights the work already underway by the municipality to reduce poverty, and it puts forth recommendations for concrete short-term priorities that both the City and community can prioritize. It also includes priorities that align with City-wide and department-specific strategic directions, and the poverty reduction strategies of the Government of Ontario and Government of Canada. The Strategy will also be responsive to any upcoming changes in provincial and federal policies.

The CSWB performance measurement framework (ACS2023-CSS-GEN-009) will be leveraged to document progress on the implementation of the Strategy. An accountability framework will be developed to reflect the complexity and level of details of the implementation action planning. Annual reporting to the CSWB Advisory Committee and Council will take place against the Strategy monitoring and evaluation framework.

#### Financial Implications:

The one-time funding requirement of \$150,000 to implement the Poverty Reduction Strategy will be presented to the Council for approval in the fall of 2024 and as part of the 2025 City Budget process.

The funding will be used for community level coordination of tax clinics and efforts to identify a sustainable solution to support individuals and families to file their taxes.

Coordination will identify and foster partnerships with community organizations and the private sector to find new opportunities and synergies ensuring tax services are provided to those who are not currently filing taxes and meet them where they are. The work will include mobilizing private sector tax accountants to donate their time for clinics. Efforts would also include advocating for other levels of government who provide income benefit programs to reduce access barriers to these programs.

#### **RÉSUMÉ**

Le Conseil municipal approuvait le 27 octobre 2021 le Plan de sécurité et de bien-être dans les collectivités (ACS2021-EPS-PPD-0003). Le Plan de sécurité et de bien-être dans les collectivités (Plan de SBEC) est une stratégie fondamentale ainsi qu'un parcours à long terme afin de contrer les facteurs de risque les plus pressants en matière de sécurité et de bien-être dans les collectivités et aussi de planifier en vue de besoins futurs. Au nombre des priorités émergeant de ce plan, il y a la sécurité financière et la réduction de la pauvreté.

La Ville d'Ottawa est particulièrement bien placée pour faciliter l'élaboration et la mise en œuvre d'une stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté fondée sur une approche d'impact collectif. En tant que collectif, la Ville et ses partenaires définiront des priorités communes, détermineront des actions mesurables, participeront à des activités de renforcement mutuel, mobiliseront des ressources appropriées et interpellent la communauté élargie, notamment des personnes ayant vécu et vivant l'expérience de la pauvreté.

La réduction de la pauvreté nécessite des mesures concrètes et des ressources permettant aux personnes vivant en situation de pauvreté de prendre les décisions relatives à leur bien-être. Il est prouvé qu'en faisant appel à une approche d'impact collectif, des changements sociaux complexes tels que la réduction de la pauvreté peuvent être réalisés en renforçant la capacité de leadership de partenaires représentatifs de divers secteurs et possédant de l'expertise pertinente pour les outiller afin d'exécuter des fonctions de base et définir des objectifs en matière d'équité.

En 2021, en vertu de l'initiative Les villes mettent fin à la pauvreté (VMFP) pilotée par l'Institut Tamarack, la Coalition des centres de ressources et de santé communautaires d'Ottawa, l'Ottawa Community Food Partnership et la Banque alimentaire d'Ottawa ont créé un partenariat pour mettre au point une stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté dans Ottawa. En 2022, les partenaires se sont réunis et ont jeté les bases de la Stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté d'Ottawa (Stratégie). En avril 2023, le Bureau de sécurité et du bien-être dans les collectivités (SBEC) a créé un Groupe consultatif composé de membres issus de plusieurs secteurs afin d'orienter et de superviser la Stratégie.

Après bien des efforts ayant consisté à mobiliser les résidents et les intervenants, à examiner les données et à obtenir l'engagement d'experts, la Stratégie est à présent composée de cinq piliers stratégiques (la sécurité alimentaire, l'emploi, la sécurité financière, le développement économique, et des parcours intégrés et simplifiés), de 10 priorités et de 26 sous-priorités.

Il a été déterminé que les mesures à court terme suivantes pour 2025-2026 seront mises à exécution avec les budgets et/ou les effectifs municipaux existants :

- Organiser en 2025 un forum sur la sécurité alimentaire en partenariat avec le secteur alimentaire.
- Établir un groupe de travail municipal pour coordonner les efforts et améliorer l'optique de la sécurité alimentaire dans les plans et les stratégies de la Ville.
- Augmenter le financement des programmes de mentorat pour les jeunes autochtones, noirs et racisés, et nouveaux arrivants.
- Coordonner les mesures de sécurité du revenu et de l'emploi entre les directions générales.
- Évaluer le marché du travail à Ottawa, et déterminer les besoins et les possibilités en termes de main-d'œuvre dans le cadre de la Stratégie de développement économique de la Ville.

Mesures à court terme pour 2024-2025 nécessitant de nouveaux investissements qui seront pris en compte dans le cadre du processus budgétaire 2025 de la Ville :

- Fournir un soutien de base et un financement ponctuel pour la coordination des comptoirs d'impôt où les personnes et les familles en ont le plus besoin. De plus, des efforts seront entrepris afin de trouver une solution durable à la coordination des comptoirs d'impôt en partenariat avec les organismes communautaires et les partenaires du secteur privé.

La présente Stratégie souligne le travail déjà entrepris par la municipalité dans le but de réduire la pauvreté et elle met de l'avant des priorités à court terme que peuvent se donner la Ville et la communauté et sur lesquelles il est possible de travailler collectivement. Elle comporte également des priorités alignées sur les orientations stratégiques de la Ville et celles de ses directions générales ainsi que sur les orientations du gouvernement de l'Ontario et du gouvernement du Canada. Par ailleurs, il sera possible d'adapter la Stratégie aux changements pouvant être apportés aux politiques provinciales et fédérales.

Le cadre d'évaluation de rendement sur la sécurité et le bien-être dans les collectivités sera utilisé (ACS2023-CSS-GEN-009) pour surveiller le déploiement de la Stratégie. Un cadre de responsabilisation correspondant aux niveaux de complexité et de détails du plan d'action de mises en œuvre de la Stratégie sera mis au point. Un rapport annuel fondé sur le cadre de surveillance et d'évaluation de la Stratégie sera remis au Comité consultatif sur la SBEC et au Conseil municipal.

Implications financières :

Le financement ponctuel de 150 000 \$ pour mettre en œuvre la Stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté sera présenté au Conseil aux fins d'approbation à l'automne 2024 et il fera partie du processus budgétaire municipal de 2025.

Le financement sera utilisé pour la coordination au niveau communautaire des comptoirs d'impôt et des efforts visant à déterminer une solution durable pour soutenir les personnes et les familles dans la préparation de leurs déclarations de revenus.

La coordination déterminera et encouragera des partenariats avec des organisations communautaires et le secteur privé afin de repérer des opportunités et des synergies pour assurer la prestation de services fiscaux à ceux qui ne produisent pas actuellement de déclarations de revenus et les rencontrer là où ils se trouvent. Le travail consistera à mobiliser des comptables fiscaux du secteur privé pour qu'ils donnent de

leur temps aux comptoirs d'impôt et à militer pour que d'autres ordres de gouvernement offrant des programmes de protection du revenu réduisent les obstacles pour accéder à ces programmes.

## **BACKGROUND**

On October 27, 2021, City Council approved the CSWB Plan ([ACS2021-EPS-PPD-0003](#)). The CSWB Plan is both a foundational strategy and a long-term journey intended to address the most pressing risk factors to community safety and well-being issues as well as plan for future needs. The CSWB Provincial Planning Framework emphasizes root causes of social issues, prevention, risk intervention, and incident response as focal areas to promote long-term community safety and well-being. This approach guides the CSWB Plan priorities, which aspire to meet the most pressing needs of Ottawa residents. One of the identified priorities emerging from this plan is financial security and poverty reduction.

This priority, based on the early findings of CSWB Plan engagement, stems from:

- The need of services, programs and policies to become sensitive to people's financial status.
- The need to address exclusion of Black, Indigenous, and newcomer communities in the workplace that impedes professional opportunity and growth and increases the effects and cycle of poverty.
- Lack of affordable amenities where people live (e.g., transit, groceries, internet, counselling services).

The Coalition of Community Health and Resources Centers, Ottawa Community Food Partnership, and Ottawa Food Bank began a partnership, in 2021, through Tamarack Institute's Cities Ending Poverty initiative to begin the development of an Ottawa poverty reduction strategy. By 2022, these partners came together to facilitate the development of an Ottawa based poverty reduction strategy. By 2023, the CSWB Office established an Advisory Group that represented multiple sectors to guide and oversee the development of the Poverty Reduction Strategy. For a list of Advisory Group members, please see Supporting Document 1.

As stated in the Term of Council Priorities 2023-2026, there is a need to support those living on low to moderate incomes in Ottawa. A strategic objective within the Priorities is to implement best practice approaches to ensure the effects of poverty and food insecurity are reduced through work with community partners.

## Why a Poverty Reduction Strategy?

Addressing poverty is a key priority for the City, as it affects the lives of all residents. The Strategy identified the increasing and chronic needs across the city and best practices and evidence on how to meaningfully reduce poverty, given its complex nature.

The focus of the Strategy involves:

- Centering voices of residents at the forefront and developing a framework to engage them meaningfully through the process of Strategy development, implementation, and evaluation.
- Setting common priorities and strategic direction for efficiency, alignment of resources.
- Facilitating coordinating efforts across government and establishing backbone support of the Strategy.

**Centering the voices of people with lived and living experience.** The need to coordinate among local actors to reduce poverty can only be addressed through engagement and listening to voices of those with lived and living experience of poverty. As one community advocate said during Strategy development, *“These voices [of those who have lived or continue to live in poverty] are our most valuable assets, as they remind us of where we’ve been, the realities that our communities continue to face, and the strengths that exist in our communities.”*

**Work is being done but strategic direction and alignment are needed to drive efficiency and alignment.** The Strategy will benefit all sectors involved in poverty reduction. The City has initiatives that are being implemented and funded that address poverty, elaborated on below. However, a framework is needed across city departments to focus on the identified priorities. A lot of work is also being done by community organizations and groups. Our community partners identified the need for more structured coordination, alignment, and backbone support to the sectors most crucial to reducing poverty.

Through a collective approach City departments and community partners will benefit from strategic alignment and direction of the priorities within the Strategy, as their existing initiatives that contribute to the Strategy can gain more support and visibility city-wide. They can also benefit from backbone support to gain knowledge from other Strategies across Canada and create theme-based allyships and advocacy efforts.



**Resources are scarce.** Both the City and community service providers are pressured. The Strategy provides a framework for a collective impact towards aligned priorities and hence aligned resources. The Strategy will equip the City and its community actors to focus resources and will allow for streamlined performance measurement metrics that help identify areas where efforts are most effective and sustainable.

**Coordination on poverty reduction, across governments, is also required.** The Government of Ontario launched a Poverty Reduction Strategy in 2020 that provides supports and services to increase the number of social assistance recipients moving to employment, targeted funding for entrepreneurs, gender-based violence and human trafficking, a student nutrition program and policies and programs for youth leaving the child welfare system.

The Government of Canada released their Poverty Reduction Strategy in 2018 with targets to reduce poverty by 20% by 2020 and 50% by 2030 and plans to establish, by 2030, an income floor above Canada's Official Poverty Line through employment income, income supports, and additional investments in prevention and stabilization services to help people stay out of poverty.

**Unique position of the City of Ottawa as backbone support.** The City is uniquely positioned to facilitate a Poverty Reduction Strategy using a collective impact approach and aligning efforts across the city and among other levels of government. In the past 16 months, the CSWB Office succeeded in bringing our community together to reach a common agenda, establish trust through collaboration, and a way forward towards systemic change.

### **Strategy Approach - Collective Impact**

Poverty is a complex matter. Collective impact, as stated in the CSWB Plan, is the approach of choice.<sup>1</sup> Collective impact engages residents, community organizations, agencies, service providers and all levels of government to work together to solve complex social issues. This approach is currently used by a third of members in the Cities Ending Poverty initiative, including the provinces of Saskatchewan and New Brunswick.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> City of Ottawa. (2021). *Community Safety and Well-Being Plan*. <https://pub-ottawa.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?documentid=86036>

<sup>2</sup> Tamarack Institute. (2022). *Communities Ending Poverty Impact Report: A Deep Dive into 2022*. [https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Communities-Ending-Poverty-Impact-Report\\_A-Deep-Dive-into-2022.pdf?hsCtaTracking=645dd63f-8b3c-4d37-a285-2d915c30c316%7C5238d95f-54b5-436d-af24-677505c674a8](https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Communities-Ending-Poverty-Impact-Report_A-Deep-Dive-into-2022.pdf?hsCtaTracking=645dd63f-8b3c-4d37-a285-2d915c30c316%7C5238d95f-54b5-436d-af24-677505c674a8)

Taking a critical perspective and understanding the added value of collective impact was crucial to the Strategy development given:

- The complexity of poverty reduction efforts.
- The systemic nature of the change that needs to happen.
- The need for available programming and funding resources to be synergetic and mutually enhancing.
- The need for a clear performance measurement framework that tracks poverty indicators both at population and program/initiative levels.

The Strategy adheres to the conditions of collective impact in the following ways:

- The governance model will have a **backbone structure** that will oversee governance and decision-making and support initiatives.
- Stakeholders developed a **common agenda** for the Strategy and agreed on a definition of poverty.
- Partners will have clearly outlined strategies within initiatives and a **shared vision for change**.
- Partners will have **shared action plans** to implement the strategy pillars and ensure that initiatives are coordinated.
- Stakeholders and partners are **continuously** engaged in all phases.
- All stakeholders will agree on **shared measurement** of poverty reduction indicators and ways to collect and use data.

The Strategy was developed through an evidence-informed approach involving analysis of population statistics and scans from other municipalities, consultations through roundtable discussions, and reviews by poverty reduction experts. This process was also guided by strategic advice from the Advisory Group and perspectives of people with lived experience of poverty.

## Council Direction

The Strategy development has been informed by directions from Council received since Council approved the CSWB Plan. The motions and recommendations to staff related to poverty reduction have been as follows:

- On July 10, 2024, a Motion by Councillor T. Kavanagh and Councillor M. Carr was carried: WHEREAS on the Ottawa Board of Health on June 17, 2024, approved a resolution supporting the concept of a Basic Income Guarantee for all people over the age of 17 in Canada to help combat low income and economic vulnerability within our community [...] THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Ottawa City Council supports the advocacy of the Ottawa Board of Health in support of this legislation and the passage of Senate Bill S-233 and House Bill C-223.
- On June 26, 2024, a Direction to Staff by Councillor M. Carr stated: That staff within the Community Social Services Department work with the Coalition of Community Health Centres to determine the cost benefit of providing support for an increased number of income tax clinics to support the increase in individuals requiring these services; and That staff report back on this as part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy to be presented to committee in Q3 2024.
- On February 27, 2024, a Motion by Councillor A. Troster was carried: THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT staff explore including poverty reduction initiatives for artists and culture workers as part of the municipal Culture Plan and that these initiatives support the representation of artists and cultural workers alongside others in precarious employment in the Corporate anti-poverty strategy currently underway.
- On June 27, 2023, a Direction to Staff by Councillor R. King stated: In regards to the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan's proposed Poverty Reduction Strategy, staff be directed to explore the incorporation of a community wealth building approach in regards to economic development considerations. Community wealth building has been defined as a system-changing approach to community economic development that works to produce equity and economic prosperity through enhanced community participation and social inclusion.

## DISCUSSION

Poverty is the deprivation of resources, choices, and power necessary for civic, cultural, economic, political and social participation in society.<sup>3</sup> Poverty reduction involves both addressing the root causes (why it occurs in the first place) and alleviating the effects of poverty in the community.<sup>4</sup> Structural barriers such as discrimination and racism contribute to differences in the poverty rate between groups. As a result of experiencing poverty, people struggle to meet their basic needs, participate fully in society, and live to their full potential. A snapshot of these experiences of poverty are described below.

### Poverty in Ottawa

- Coinciding with the end of temporary pandemic benefits and high inflation in the Ottawa-Gatineau region, the poverty rate increased to 9.1% in 2022 (from 6.5% in 2021), according to the Government of Canada's official poverty line, the Market Basket Measure.<sup>5</sup>

### Food Insecurity

- Between 2022 and 2023, the percentage of households experiencing food insecurity in Ottawa increased by 8.9 percentage points from 14.8% to 23.7%.<sup>6</sup>

### Barriers to employment

- Ottawa is expected to add about 189,000 jobs from 2018 to 2046.<sup>7</sup> Some populations experience higher barriers to employment due to conditions that impede their ability to acquire skills and training for gainful employment. Efforts are needed to ensure fair access to employment opportunities.

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<sup>3</sup> CAWI & City of Ottawa. (2017). *Equity and Inclusion Snapshot on Poverty*, p.5.

<sup>4</sup> City of Ottawa. (2019). *Community Funding Framework*.

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada. (2024). *Table 11-10-0135-01 Low income statistics by age, sex and economic family type*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1110013501>

<sup>6</sup> Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (2024). *Technical notes: household food insecurity snapshot*. <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/Data-and-Analysis/Health-Equity/Household-Food-Insecurity>

<sup>7</sup> City of Ottawa. (2022). *City of Ottawa's Official Plan, Growth Management Framework*. <https://ottawa.ca/en/planning-development-and-construction/official-plan-and-master-plans/official-plan#section-9190f110-4c31-467a-ba8c-927bb0a0a51d>

## Financial insecurity

- For households that rely on government transfers as their main source of income, the average cost of housing and healthy food is equal to or more than their total monthly income. In addition, people with full-time minimum wage jobs have limited funds to cover the costs of essentials like transportation, utilities, and clothing.<sup>8</sup>

## Economic development opportunities

- A community wealth-building approach to the City's economic development is beneficial, as small and social purpose businesses are experiencing more uncertainty and funding challenges.<sup>9</sup> This approach helps local community partners and entrepreneurs own and manage assets while keeping the resources within communities.<sup>10</sup>

## Need for integrated and simplified pathways

- Community members identified challenges in accessing wraparound services in convenient locations.<sup>11</sup> Delivering multiple services in one location acknowledges the interrelatedness of poverty, homelessness, mental health, and other challenges.<sup>12</sup>

## Strategy Development Process

Ottawa's Poverty Reduction Strategy was developed during a 16-month period from April 2023 to August 2024. The following activities were used to develop the Strategy:

- Formalized a community-led Advisory Group that will lead the Strategy collective approach.
- Conducted a data review and analysis to establish evidence on poverty in Ottawa.
- Engaged key community members, residents, persons with lived and living experience of poverty, City departments, and experts on the Strategy pillars.

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<sup>8</sup> Ottawa Public Health. (2023). *Monitoring Food Affordability in Ottawa*. <https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-topics/food-insecurity.aspx#2023-Income-scenarios-in-Ottawa>

<sup>9</sup> Canadian Federation of Independent Business. (2021). *#SmallBusinessEveryDay dashboard shows only 47 per cent of small firms remain fully open*. <https://www.cfib-fcei.ca/en/media/news-releases/181000-canadian-small-business-owners-now-contemplating-pulling-plug-putting-24>

<sup>10</sup> City of Ottawa. (2023). *Ottawa's Poverty Reduction Strategy: Community Roundtable #1 What We Heard Report*. <https://engage.ottawa.ca/10356/widgets/49474/documents/128854>.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Observatory of Public Sector Innovation. *Systems Change*. <https://oecd-opsi.org/guide/systems-change/>

- Formed a strategic vision, guiding principles that commit to equity, intersectionality, and other key CSWB Plan values, and considerations.
- Designed strategic pillars, priorities, and sub-priorities.

### Community-Led Advisory Group

An Advisory Group was established to embody and voice diverse community perspectives. The group represented networks and organizations from the Cities Ending Poverty partnership for Ottawa as well as organizations beyond the partnership. The Advisory Group met regularly between April 2023 and September 2024, to provide advice on the process, and the strategy's content. Members drew on their extensive resources and networks, ensuring broad, diverse, and meaningful community engagement. Membership reflects the poverty related sectors of social services (e.g., food security, settlement), business (e.g., economic development), health, and education and research. The full membership of the Advisory Group is available in Supporting Document 1.

### Data Review and Analysis

The CSWB Office conducted a comprehensive data review to examine the following:

- Information about the current state of poverty in Ottawa.
- Identify trends in poverty levels.
- Describe experiences of poverty.
- Highlight between and within-population differences in poverty based on sociodemographic data.
- Provincial and federal policies related to poverty indicators.
- Poverty reduction best practices from other Canadian and global cities.

The findings of the review supported the Advisory Group to validate findings of community engagement and further scope the Strategy. Data was also used to ensure that the Strategy follows best practices within the pillars, priorities, and sub-priorities.

A report with the findings entitled [Data on the Current State of Poverty in Ottawa, September 2024](#), can be found in the link provided.

### Engagement

A wide scope engagement strategy was designed to ensure that community voices were heard. The engagement strategy included activities to ensure active participation

of established community key actors, community residents, people with lived and living experience of poverty, and City departments are engaged.

Engagement took place through the following activities:

- Three community stakeholder and resident roundtables and two listening sessions, with a total of 354 participants representing over 70 organizations.
- Three listening sessions were conducted by community partners and organizations soliciting feedback from their community sectors and residents.
- Targeted engagement of people with lived and living experience of poverty.
- Internal engagement of six City departments with mandates crosscutting with Strategy pillars.
- Engagement of five community experts and researchers including Tamarack Institute and the [PROOF](#) centre at the University of Toronto.

### Strategic Vision and Guiding Principles

Guided by the Advisory Group and validated through engagement, the Strategy has the following vision: *People have the resources they need so they can make decisions about their well-being and pursue their full potential.*

The Strategy is committed to the following ten principles: Intersectionality, collaboration, evidence-informed, gender lens, Indigenous rights, lived and living experience leadership, race lens, representation, rights-based, and trauma-informed lens.

### **Actions Taken by the City to Address Poverty Supporting the Vision**

The Strategy aligns with existing work plans and initiatives already being implemented, in some cases funded, and coordinated by City departments. In 2024, five City service areas allocated \$122,577,122 towards poverty reduction. These funds went to important initiatives that served 111,224 people and 16,502 households in 2024. A list of examples of the initiatives underway and their contributions to poverty reduction can be found in Appendix A.

### **Goals, Pillars, Priorities, and Sub-Priorities**

The Strategy has five goals, which communicate the desired outcomes from the implementation of the Strategy and are guided by strategic vision. The five goals are:

- People living in or at risk of poverty have equitable access to enough healthy, affordable, safe, and culturally appropriate food.

- People living in or at risk of poverty have access to consistent income and job security.
- People living in or at risk of poverty can acquire additional resources and benefits.
- People living in or at risk of poverty participate equitably in and benefit equally from economic growth.
- People living in or at risk of poverty can access integrated services and supports they need and trust.

The goals correspond to five strategic pillars (food security, employment, financial security, economic development, and integrated and simplified pathways), 10 priorities and 26 sub-priorities, which are described in detail in Supporting Document 2.

### **Alignment with Municipal Strategies**

Examples of municipal strategies that align with the Poverty Reduction Strategy are outlined below.

- **City of Ottawa Strategic Plan 2023 – 2026.**<sup>13</sup> Alignment with strategic objective “advance poverty reduction” under priority 1) A city that has affordable housing and is more livable for all, and priority 2) A city with a diversified and prosperous economy.
- **The City of Ottawa’s Anti-Racism Strategy 2023-2028.**<sup>14</sup> Alignment with actions, 1) Economic development, 2) Health outcomes, 3) Children and youth development, and 4) Achieving racial equity in the workplace.
- **Women and Gender Equity Strategy.**<sup>15</sup> Alignment with priorities, 1) Meaningful public engagement of intersectional groups of women and gender diverse persons, 2) Gender-based resource allocation, and 3) Gender-based analysis and gender lens on City’s policies and strategies.

### **Priorities for Implementation in 2025/2026**

To advance work quickly on the Strategy, City staff identified short-term priorities that will be implemented jointly with the community in 2025/2026. These priorities were selected based on community engagement and Advisory Group as being urgent,

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<sup>13</sup> City of Ottawa. 2023. *City of Ottawa Strategic Plan 2023-2026*.

[https://documents.ottawa.ca/sites/documents/files/StrategicPlan\\_2023-2026\\_EN.pdf](https://documents.ottawa.ca/sites/documents/files/StrategicPlan_2023-2026_EN.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> City of Ottawa. (2023). *The City of Ottawa’s Anti-Racism Strategy 2023-2028*

<https://documents.ottawa.ca/sites/documents/files/coo-ar-report-en.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> City of Ottawa. (2021). *Women and Gender Equity Strategy 2021-2025*.

[https://documents.ottawa.ca/sites/documents/files/wges\\_en\\_0.pdf](https://documents.ottawa.ca/sites/documents/files/wges_en_0.pdf)



rendering sustainable results, and impacting the future work of the community in the coming years. These priorities also have the strongest alignment with short-term objectives of existing plans and frameworks for the City. Each short-term priority is listed below under four pillars of the strategy:

<b>Pillar, Priority &amp; Sub-Priority</b>	<b>Short Term Action</b>	<b>Department</b>
1. Food Security		
<i>1.1 Address household food insecurity through policy making, funding and coordination</i>		
1.1.1 Establish a coordinated mechanism to ensure equitable access to food.	The CSWB Office will support a community led food security coordination effort that will lay foundation for the sector to engage all relevant stakeholders, identify sector priorities and align programming. This will be done through a community-led Food Security Forum in 2025, followed by coordination activities.	CSSD (CSWB Office)
1.1.2 Integrate a food insecurity lens into City-led strategies and plans.	Ottawa Public Health, Social Development branch of GREIIRSD and the CSWB Office will co-lead a food security working group mandated to coordinate food security work and review municipal policies from a food security perspective.	CSSD (CSWB Office, GREIIRSD)  Ottawa Public Health
2. Employment		
<i>2.1 Reduce barriers and discrimination in the workplace facing job seekers and employees from Black, 2SLGBTQ+, and racialized groups.</i>		

<b>Pillar, Priority &amp; Sub-Priority</b>	<b>Short Term Action</b>	<b>Department</b>
2.1.2 Fund skill development programs for Black and racialized youth that lead to decent work.	The Financial Literacy Program, under the City's Anti-Racism Strategy will fund place-based programs beyond school hours and foster leadership and mentorship opportunities for Indigenous, Black, and racialized youth.	CSSD (GREIIRSD)
	Together, Community Funding and CSWB Fund will open \$1.4 million to support eligible programs that can include skills development or mentorship programs. These programs can offer training and networking for youth from racialized, newcomer and underrepresented communities	CSSD (CSWB Office, GREIIRSD)
3. Financial Security		
3.1 <i>Increase access to tax-related benefits and support programs</i>		
3.1.2 Provide support to sustain a backbone support system for tax clinic coordination among providers, to improve service offerings and reduce pressure on income tax filing.	The CSWB Office will provide support to improving pathways and access to tax clinic services meeting persons in need where they are. In addition, efforts will be undertaken to find a sustainable solution for tax clinic coordination.	CSSD (CSWB Office, ESS)

Pillar, Priority & Sub-Priority	Short Term Action	Department
	Employment Social Services will advance system level coordination of employment and income security measures in alignment with the Strategy.	CSSD (ESS)
4. Economic Development		
<i>4.3 Create clear navigation pathways linking current and future economic growth trends with labour opportunities including social enterprises, small businesses, artists and culture workers.</i>		
4.3.1 Map available talent and opportunities in growing economic sectors offering decent work.	As outlined in the Council approved Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan, Economic Development Services will undertake an assessment of Ottawa’s labour market and collaborate with partners, employers, and post-secondary institutions to understand Ottawa’s workforce trends, needs, and opportunities.	Strategic Initiatives

The actions above are mutually enhancing, so that a short-term actions under one pillar will enhance short-term actions under another pillar. For example, coordination of tax clinic services to reach vulnerable populations using food banks under the Financial Security pillar will enhance the goal of the Food Security pillar. Similarly, an assessment of Ottawa’s labour market under the Economic Development pillar will inform the priorities of grants available for Black and racialized youth under the Employment pillar.

These short-term actions leverage existing funds to align with PRS priorities. The request for new one-time funding of \$150,000 is expected to support efforts to:

- Increase the number of individuals and families who complete their taxes thereby putting more income in their pockets.
- Coordinate volunteer income tax clinics across Ottawa to ensure services are provided to those in most need and meeting them where they are.
- Mobilize private sector tax accountants donating their time for clinics.
- Ensure that tax income clinic service providers are coordinating to create synergies and efficiencies with the available resources they have.
- Advocate for other levels of government who provide income benefit programs to reduce access barriers to these programs.
- Find a sustainable solution to tax clinic coordination in partnership with community agencies and private sector partners.

Evidence shows that low-income individuals spend their income in the local economy. This results in increased investment through spending on food, rent, and local services such as transit. Longer-term increased financial stability through accessing income supports through other levels of governments has the potential to reduce the need for municipally funded services for low-income families. In addition, the completion of taxes is a critical eviction prevention tool as those who receive any housing subsidy are required to reapply for benefits annually with their Notice of Assessment.

Increasing the number of individuals accessing tax clinics was identified as a quick way to ensure there is an increase in incomes short-term.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

As a priority under the umbrella of the CSWB Plan, the Strategy will continue to be guided by the CSWB Plan's governance framework as approved by City Council on April 27, 2022 ([ACS2022-CSS-GEN-004](#)). This includes oversight through the established CSWB Advisory Committee.

Under the supervision of the CSWB Advisory Committee, the Strategy's implementation will be carried out using collective impact principles through the collaboration of the following: 1) A community-based Advisory Group, 2) the CSWB office, and 3) Community organizations working in the selected priorities within a given timeframe. The CSWB Office will serve as a backbone support to the Strategy and will work with the Advisory Group to kick off implementation of the short-term strategic priorities identified above.

Upon City Council approval of the Strategy, implementation will run from 2025 to 2026, followed by a midterm review and re-engagement in 2027. In 2030, a refresh of the strategy will take place.

Council will receive updates on the strategy as part of the annual reporting on the CSWB Plan. The Strategy will follow the CSWB performance measurement framework as outlined in the update to City Council on July 27, 2023 ([ACS2023-CSS-GEN-009](#)). A Strategy monitoring and evaluation framework will be developed to reflect the complexity and level of details of the implementation action planning. Aspects of the monitoring and evaluation that align with the CSWB performance measurement framework include:

- **Evaluation of specific initiatives.** The Strategy lists strategic actions associated with each of its five pillars: food security, employment, financial security, economic development, and integrated and simplified pathways.
- **Evaluation of processes to support Strategy activities and sustainability.** The Strategy will follow a collective impact approach to implementing strategic priorities. The Strategy backbone will facilitate the development of process evaluation outcomes related to working together, through a collective impact approach. This will inform and improve ways of working throughout the implementation of the Strategy.
- **Tracking population indicators to inform knowledge of context.** Population-based indicators related to poverty will be tracked to ensure stakeholders are informed about the current state of poverty in Ottawa and indicator trends across time. Disseminating this information to stakeholders informs the strategic direction of the Strategy and its priorities.

A fulsome evaluation will take place in 2027.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The one-time funding requirement of \$150,000 to implement the Poverty Reduction Strategy will be presented to the Council for approval in the fall of 2024 and as part of the 2025 City Budget process.

The funding requirement will provide a community agency funding to enhance coordination of tax clinics for low-income individuals and families.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no legal impediments to the implementation of the report recommendations.

## COMMENTS BY THE WARD COUNCILLOR(S)

There are no comments by ward councillors as the Poverty Reduction Strategy is a city-wide initiative.

## ADVISORY COMMITTEE(S) COMMENTS

The Community Safety and Well-Being Advisory Committee received an update on the Poverty Reduction Strategy roadmap and strategic pillars during the March 18, 2024 Committee meeting. Feedback received during the meeting was incorporated into the development of the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

## CONSULTATION

The consultations that took place for the Poverty Reduction Strategy included the following activities:

- 1) **Community engagement through roundtables and listening sessions:** Three roundtables and two listening sessions were held between June 2023 and July 2024. Each roundtable took a whole-of-community approach: a wide representation of sectors gathered to begin drafting the strategy, to build consensus on the priorities, and to focus the collective work. To ground the discussions, the consultations included persons with lived experience of poverty to share their voice. After each roundtable, feedback was analyzed and listening sessions were held to share findings with the broader community and validate roundtable feedback.<sup>16,17</sup> Following the roundtables and listening sessions, the strategy was revised. In total, there were **354** roundtable and listening session participants representing more than **70** organizations.
- 2) **Internal engagement with City of Ottawa departments:** The City departments and services areas that were engaged include Ottawa Public Health, Community and Social Services Department, Finance and Corporate Services Department, Planning, Development and Building Department, Recreation, Cultural and Facility Services, and Strategic Initiatives. Internal engagement aimed at identifying poverty reduction actions already undertaken by City departments and

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<sup>16</sup> City of Ottawa. (2023). Ottawa's Poverty Reduction Strategy: Community Roundtable #1 What We Heard Report. <https://engage.ottawa.ca/10356/widgets/49474/documents/128854>.

<sup>17</sup> City of Ottawa. (2023). Ottawa's Poverty Reduction Strategy: Community Roundtable #2 What We Heard Report. <https://engage.ottawa.ca/10356/widgets/49474/documents/128855>.

creating synergies with existing strategies and plans tied to the Poverty Reduction Strategy pillars, priorities and sub-priorities.

- 3) **Engagement of community experts and academia:** The initial design of the Strategy took place in partnership with Tamarack Institute, a leading organization in using the collective impact approach in tackling poverty in communities in Canada and the World. In consultation with the Advisory Group members, the CSWB Office reached out to five key professionals and academics who have extensive experience and knowledge on the Poverty Reduction Strategy pillars. They offered technical feedback to refine priorities and strengthen the strategy's alignment with other poverty-reduction efforts at both local and national levels.
- 4) **Engagement of people with lived and living experience:** was done through targeted outreach to community stakeholders. People with lived and living experience of poverty attended Strategy roundtables and listening sessions and provided their concentrated feedback. The CSWB office ensured to remove all barriers facing people with lived and living experience to fully participate in engagement activities including provision of honoraria.

## **ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS**

As stated in the Corporate Accessibility Policy, the City of Ottawa is committed to providing equal treatment to people with disabilities with respect to the use and benefit of City services, programs and facilities in a manner that respects their dignity and that is equitable in relation to the broader public.

All actions that arise from the Poverty Reduction Strategy will adhere to accessibility legislative framework that includes the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA).

In Canada, the percentage of people with disabilities who experience poverty is twice that of people without disabilities (12.6% vs 5.9% respectively among those who are between 16-64 years of age).<sup>18</sup>

As outlined in the report, community roundtables and listening sessions included people with lived experience of poverty, including people with disabilities. People were most concerned with the lack of targeted approaches to address poverty for those who experience disabilities. For example, people stated addressing poverty is difficult when

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<sup>18</sup> Statistics Canada. (2024). Table 11-10-0090-01 Poverty and low-income statistics by disability status. <https://doi.org/10.25318/1110009001-eng>.

the main challenge for some is getting support for mental health and substance use issues.

To incorporate the feedback of people with lived experience of poverty, the Poverty Reduction Strategy established priority 2.2, *support people living in poverty to actively participate in the workforce*. Within this priority is a commitment to develop policies to support people living in poverty experiencing mental health and substance use issues and establish ways to reduce stigma among employers.

The governance and implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy will continue to engage people with lived experience of poverty and disabilities. City staff will also engage the Accessibility Advisory Committee on planning for initiatives to reduce barriers for people living in poverty with disabilities as laid out in the strategy.

### **ASSET MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

There are no asset management implications for the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

### **CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

There are no climate implications for the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

### **DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY IMPLICATIONS**

There are no delegated authority implications for the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

### **ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS**

The Poverty Reduction Strategy aligns with three of the City's Economic Development Strategy priorities:

- 1) Partnerships and Collaboration
- 2) Connectivity
- 3) Talent

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no environmental implications for the Poverty Reduction Strategy.



## **INDIGENOUS, GENDER AND EQUITY IMPLICATIONS**

### ***Indigenous policy considerations are as follows:***

The aim of the Poverty Reduction Strategy is to follow the guidance of the Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition to contribute to reconciliation by reducing the multifaceted experiences of poverty for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people. Throughout the strategy implementation, Indigenous people and communities will continue to be engaged.

### ***Gender and equity implications of the Poverty Reduction Strategy are as follows:***

Before the first roundtable, the City's Community Safety and Well-Being Office connected with community organizations that work with or represent intersectional groups of the community including Black and racialized communities, newcomers and immigrants, 2SLGBTQIIA+, women networks and gender-based violence sector to ensure there is equitable representation in roundtables. The Office also invited organizations that support or represent immigrants, newcomers, seniors, women, gender-diverse people, and racialized groups.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy took an equity lens into the development of priorities and sub-priorities through diverse representation across consultations, subject matter experts on gender and equity and anti-racism. The Strategy priorities are explicit about Black and racialized communities being disproportionately impacted by poverty. It also acknowledges in its priorities that women and seniors among those at higher risk of economic abuse.

The performance measurement framework of Strategy will examine disaggregated data at the local and population-level on indicators of poverty. The long-term goal is to ensure that activities and initiatives outlined in the strategy lessen the extent to which people are disproportionately affected by poverty.

## **RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

There are risk implications. These risks have been identified and explained in Supporting Document 2 and are being managed by the appropriate staff.

## **RURAL IMPLICATIONS**

Rural poverty in Ottawa exists but is harder to capture in the data, because the numbers of people living in poverty are less concentrated and spread across different rural

communities. Rural Affairs Office was engaged to review early design of the Strategy recognizing the challenges for those living in poverty to access important services like health care, groceries, employment services and mental health supports due to limited-service hours, inaccessible locations, and reduced transit services. The current design of the Strategy will benefit rural communities and will partially address their needs. The Community Safety and Well-Being Office will continue to work alongside the Rural Affairs office to understand needs and participate in the upcoming Rural Summit in 2024.

## **TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS**

There are no technology implications in the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

## **TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES**

The approval of the Poverty Reduction Strategy will be the first step towards achieving strategic objective “advance poverty reduction” in the Term of Council priority, “a city that has affordable housing and is more livable by all.”

The proposed priorities and sub-priorities within Poverty Reduction Strategy that work towards improving access to mental health and substance use health supports, licensed child-care, and employment services, and equitable, responsive, and coordinated services, also align with other strategic objectives within the 2023-2026 Term of Council Priority, “a city that has affordable housing and is more livable by all.”

As well, the focus on economic growth through the economic development priorities within the Poverty Reduction Strategy align with the 2023-2026 Term of Council Priority, “a city with a diversified and prosperous economy.”

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

Document 1 – List of Advisory Group Members

Document 2 – RISE UP: A Collective Impact Poverty Reduction Strategy, Ottawa 2025-2029

## **DISPOSITION**

CSSD will also implement any direction received as part of this report's consideration.

## **APPENDIX A – Examples of City Service Area Funding Allocations to Poverty Reduction Initiatives by Funding Source**

### **Municipal Funding**

- Community Funding allocated \$5,884,122 to agencies through the Community Funding Framework through its poverty reduction service priority in 2024.
- Employment and Social Services and OCTranspo support residents through the Community Bus Pass and Equipass programs, providing reduced fare transit options; in 2024 the budget for these programs amounted to \$7,043,000.
- Community Safety and Well-Being Office administered \$3 million in municipal funding for community partners to lead an alternate response team and wrap-around support system.
- The Integrated Neighbourhood Services Team (INST) within Community and Social Services operates within 27 priority neighborhoods and over 16 family overflow shelters, Both INST and the Integrated Departmental Task Force have been prioritizing place-based programs and services tailored to the needs of priority neighbourhood residents, newcomers and refugees including the Workforce Readiness Program strives to alleviate transportation barriers by providing bus tickets to participants and the Free Culturally Appropriate Lunches program.
- The Ottawa Hand in Hand subsidy is an annual amount (\$185 in 2024) for eligible households that can be used towards a City of Ottawa membership, admission or registered programs. More than 11,500 individuals were approved for Hand in Hand and over \$1.15M of subsidy was used in 2023.
- The Community Housing and Benefits Branch provides approximately \$77 million in operating funding annually to non-profits, co-op's to provide subsidized rental housing. In addition, approximately \$28.5 million annually is provided for rent supplement and portable housing allowance benefits with non-profits, co-op's and private market landlords. The City of Ottawa is required to maintain 16,502 rent-g geared-to-income units across the housing portfolio.

## **Provincial Funding**

- Employment and Social Services supports over 50,000 clients through Ontario Works.
- As an Employment Ontario delivery partner, Employment and Social Services supports 17,600 clients in finding employment and information on tax clinics.
- In 2024, 30,000 children aged 0-6 experienced fee reductions made possible by the new Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system funding.
- In 2024, there were approximately 8,500 subsidized child care placements in the community.