



Regional Board Report

Information

Approved for Board Consideration

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Reardon".

Brian Reardon, CAO

To: Regional Board

From: Todd Cashin, Director of Community Services

Date: April 14, 2022

Subject: Central Okanagan Poverty and Wellness Strategy Update

Voting Entitlement: *All Directors – Unweighted Corporate Vote – Simple Majority (LGA s.208)*

Purpose: To provide the Regional Board with an update on the Central Okanagan Poverty and Wellness Strategy (COPAWS).

Executive Summary:

The Central Okanagan Poverty Reduction Committee (COPRC) formed in 2017 with the goal of developing and implementing a regional poverty reduction strategy. In 2020, the Central Okanagan Community Wellness Analysis provided baseline data and insights into poverty and wellness both in the region and within each community. In 2020, Peachland, West Kelowna, Kelowna and Lake Country partnered with the Regional District of the Central Okanagan (RDCO) and were successful in obtaining a \$149,000 grant from the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) for the development of the Central Okanagan Poverty and Wellness Strategy (COPAWS).

The purpose of this project is to provide a coordinated, shared community framework for poverty reduction in the Central Okanagan and strengthening coordination between regional systems through improved policies, practices and resources. This project endeavors to create a meaningful report which supports actions to address poverty and improve wellness in the Central Okanagan.

Public engagement is complete and will form the foundation for the final Strategy. The Consultant, Jen Casorso of Urban Matters, will provide an update on the stakeholder engagement in the form of a "What we Heard" report and will provide an overview of next steps.

Recommendation:

THAT the Regional Board receives the Central Okanagan Poverty and Awareness Strategy report from the Director of Community Services, dated April 14, 2022, for information.

Respectfully Submitted:



Todd Cashin, Director of Community Services
Prepared by: Cheryl Wiebe, Senior Planner

Attachment: 1. "What we Heard Report" presentation

Strategic Plan Alignment:

Priorities: Sustainable Communities, Choose an item.

Values: Collaboration, Regional Perspective

Background:

In March 2019, the Province released their poverty reduction strategy called TogetherBC which set targets to reduce the overall poverty rate in British Columbia. Provincial funding was made available through the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) to support local governments in reducing poverty at the local level.

The Central Okanagan Poverty Reduction Committee (COPRC), formed in 2017 with the goal of developing and implementing a regional poverty reduction strategy. In 2020, the Central Okanagan Community Wellness Analysis provided baseline data and insights into poverty and wellness in the region and within each community.

The previous work of the COPRC, the Regional District, and member municipalities have set the stage for a community driven, regional approach to addressing poverty and wellness. In 2020, Peachland, West Kelowna, Kelowna and Lake Country partnered with the Regional District of the Central Okanagan (RDCO) and were successful in obtaining a \$149,000 grant from the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) for the development of the Central Okanagan Poverty and Wellness Strategy (COPAWS).

A Leadership committee, with representatives of local government and community service providers, was established and is actively supporting the strategy development through communication, outreach, community connection and knowledge. A governance committee with representatives from each member municipality is providing project oversight ensuring that the strategy reflects the unique needs of each community and aligns with and leverages existing strengths and resources.

Due to several challenges encountered including but not limited to impacts of COVID-19, in July 2021, this project was put on hold. In November 2021, Urban Matters CCC Ltd. was hired to complete the project scope for the June 2022 grant deadline.

The "What We Heard Report" is a summary of information collected from the community engagement sessions.

To date the engagement activities deployed have reached the following individuals or groups across the RDCO:

Engagement Method	Strategy Applied	Reach
Public Survey	Online survey distributed in 2022 by Urban Matters	748 respondents
People with Lived and Living Experience Survey	Online and paper survey distributed in 2021 by the United Way	223 respondents
Community Forum	Online public meeting to discuss poverty, its impacts, and community vision for reducing poverty	10 participants
Service Provider Interviews	Specifically for service providers working with target populations who were unable to make our other engagement, interviews were held to ensure their perspectives were collected	2 interviews
People with Lived and Living Experience Engagement	A combination of questionnaires distributed by service providers, interviews, and focus groups with people experiencing poverty	10 participants
Preliminary Planning and Implementation Session	A focused workshop with service providers and local government representatives to begin identifying possible solutions and interventions to reduce poverty	11 organizations
Local Area Focus Groups	Local community focus groups with service providers in West Kelowna, Peachland, and Lake Country were held to gather community specific concerns and experiences	16 participants over 3 focus groups
Indigenous Engagement	A combination of interviews, focus groups and workshops with Indigenous community leaders and service providers were held with Okanagan Indian Band, West Bank First Nation, Metis Community, Okanagan Nation Alliance, and Urban Indigenous services	Urban Indigenous Organizations – 5 engagements 12 participants Okanagan Indian Band – 3 engagements 8 participants Westbank First Nation - 2 engagements and 6 participants Okanagan Nation Alliance – 2 engagements and 8 participants
Leadership Committee Meetings	The Leadership committee has met to provide project oversight an input into the project.	20 Organizations over two sessions since the restart including representation from the 4 member municipalities

A summary of key findings is as follows:

- Imagining a future without poverty: participants described a community where every person and family feels secure in meeting their basic needs (housing, food, clothing, transportation, etc.) and feels a sense of meaningful inclusion.
- Indigenous communities and community members who participated emphasized that their experience of poverty is colored by the ongoing impacts of colonialism, capacity challenges, and entrenched racism and stigma. These systems must be addressed for meaningful change to happen.
- People experiencing poverty were also experiencing more exclusion and less hopefulness than participants who were not living in poverty.
- Belonging and inclusion are areas that could have significant impact on overall experiences. Ideas for improving social cohesion and bringing people together included free public events and community meals.
- Transportation remains a barrier to access and involvement with the community, including accessing health and mental health services, maintaining employment, grocery shopping, etc. In the Person with Lived and Living Experiences (PWWLE) survey, transportation ranked among the top choices of services that help or would help survey respondents to stay employed.
- High cost of housing remains a significant barrier to thriving in the region. Strong leadership and decisive action are needed.
- Universal or more widely available supports are needed as the number of people living in poverty who are also working is increasing. Many supports have requirements or restrictions such as age, whether you are employed, housed, etc. More universal benefits would reduce 'competition' and allow more people to access judgment free support when needed.
- More and more people in the RDCO need support with managing costs of daily living such as housing, transportation, food, health, and recreation, etc.
- Rising cost of living is putting more and more pressure on budgets. This is exacerbated for people on fixed incomes such as people who are retired and/or living on disability incomes.
- People living with a disability are disproportionately impacted by poverty – they have both fewer means for increasing their financial security (eg: live on a fixed income while costs rise) and have increased needs (higher costs of daily living). Accessibility and access to transportation, housing, education, employment, etc. mean that they are excluded from more spaces (physical and social) than other community members.
- Seniors and Elders are at high risk for poverty, especially as their physical needs change and need more supports or cannot maintain their own housing as well.

- Food is a powerful support for people. Not only is food a basic need but a community meal or event can bring diverse people together and strengthen community cohesion. With rising food costs and the isolation experienced during COVID-19 impacting everyone, community meals are one way to ease financial challenges while bridging divides and uniting people.

A few additional engagements will happen in April and will be included in the final draft strategy.

This “What We Heard” report will be presented to the Leadership Committee, the Regional Board, and posted on the RDCO project webpage. Participants of the lived and living experience focus groups and interviews will receive the draft with opportunity to provide comment and confirm their voice is fairly represented. As well, implementation planning sessions will be conducted and will help to inform the final draft strategy which is targeted to be presented to the Regional Board on May 31, 2022, and the member municipalities and First Nations shortly thereafter. The final strategy will be presented to the public during the Housing Symposium scheduled for June 8, 2022.

As there were project synergies, and to better understand residents’ needs, the public survey also included questions relating to the RDCO’s Regional Housing Strategy (RHS). This helped to ensure that target audiences were not experiencing survey fatigue and to maximize use of staff and consultant resources. The project is currently in Phase 3 – Draft Strategy Development.

The Central Okanagan Poverty and Wellness Strategy will require Regional Board endorsement prior to finalization and grant report submission.

Project Timeline

The project timeline is as follows:



***Phase 4 note - the grant deadline has been extended until the end of June*

Considerations:

Organizational/External:

As the primary applicant, the Regional District of the Central Okanagan is responsible to receive and manage the grant funding on behalf of the regional partners. The RDCO also assumed responsibility for the completion of the project, reporting requirements and maintaining proper fiscal management. A staff

liaison has been appointed for the duration of the strategy development to provide regular updates to the Regional Board.

Financial:

\$149,000 grant was provided from the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM)

Legal/Statutory Authority:

Mandated through the Poverty Reduction Strategy Act, the Province has created a poverty reduction strategy called TogetherBC: British Columbia's Poverty Reduction Strategy. The intent of the Poverty Reduction Planning & Action program is to support local governments in reducing poverty at the local level and to support the Province's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Considerations not applicable:

- Alternate Recommendation
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