



AMBROSE  
UNIVERSITY

# Strategic Plan

Canadian Poverty Institute  
2023-2028



AMBROSE





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**The Canadian Poverty Institute is an inter-disciplinary institute housed within Ambrose University that seeks to heal poverty through teaching, research and practice. Ambrose University is located in the traditional territories of the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) and the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes the Siksika, the Piikuni, the Kainai, the Tsuut'ina, and the Iyârhe Nakoda. We are situated on land where the Bow River meets the Elbow River, and the traditional Blackfoot name of this place is Moh' kins'tsis which we now call the city of Calgary. The city of Calgary is also home to Metis Nation of Alberta, Region III.**

**Training leaders and finding solutions to heal material, social and spiritual poverty.**

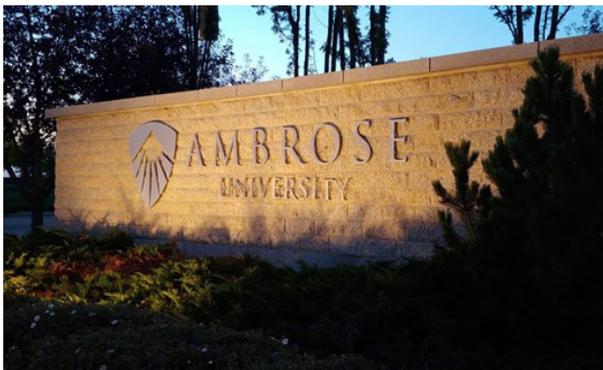
## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Poverty Institute (CPI) is an inter-disciplinary institute that was established in 2014 at Ambrose University. It functions as an integral part of Ambrose University that aligns with and extends the University's mission. The Canadian Poverty Institute works with other Ambrose University Institutes, faculty, students and the broader community to deepen our understanding of poverty and how to address it. This strategic plan lays out the direction of the Canadian Poverty Institute over the next 5 years.

## 2. AMBROSE UNIVERSITY

Ambrose University is a teaching-based university in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. The mission of Ambrose University is to “*prepare men and women for wise, joyful and redemptive engagement in the church, society and the created order through excellent Christian post-secondary education.*” Ambrose University strives to be a vibrant institution of exemplary quality, committed to the integration of Christian faith and principles, and widely recognized and acclaimed for its pursuit of truth and its redemptive impact on church and society.

Ambrose University offers a wide variety of undergraduate Arts and Science programs and a graduate level Seminary. The University has a growing array of work that promotes faculty research and supports student development as researchers and practitioners. There are three Institutes housed within Ambrose University: the Canadian Poverty Institute, the Flourishing Congregations Institute and the Jaffray Centre for Global Initiatives.



At Ambrose University, the structures that support, evaluate, protect, and promote research and scholarly activity are built upon the basis of the Ambrose Research Mandate, which affirms that, “*research and scholarly activity complement the primary instructional role of faculty, enriching classroom teaching and creating a scholarly atmosphere on campus.*” Ambrose University Institutes play significant contributory roles in extending the teaching and scholarly mandate of the University.

## 3. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Poverty remains a persistent reality in Canada, with certain population groups at greater risk of poverty than others. In Canada, populations with a higher incidence of poverty include Indigenous persons, racialized persons, recent immigrants, persons with disabilities, lone-parent families and persons living alone.<sup>ix</sup> Of particular concern are the racial and gender dimensions of poverty, particularly as they intersect with others forms of oppression.

Poverty comes at a cost. It is estimated that Canada spends between \$72.5 and 86.1 billion annually due to the costs associated with poverty<sup>vi</sup> while the annual cost of homelessness is estimated at \$7 billion.<sup>iii</sup> Poverty is associated with reduced levels of trust and social cohesion that affect all of society. Poverty also compromises the mental and physical health of adults and children as well as cognitive functioning. The developmental impacts on children are particularly important as they can affect biological, cognitive, emotional and social domains of development into adulthood.<sup>vi vii viii</sup>

Poverty is a multi-dimensional condition. While the common understanding of poverty is that it involves a critical lack of income that interferes with a person's ability to meet their basic needs, the experience of poverty is much more complex, involving material, social and spiritual dimensions. The multi-dimensional nature of poverty is reflected in the following definition of poverty that was adopted by the Government of Canada in its national poverty strategy.

*The condition of a person who is deprived of the resources, means, choices and power necessary to acquire and maintain a basic level of living standards and to facilitate integration and participation in society.<sup>ix</sup>*

Increasingly, poverty is also understood as a violation of human rights. Under the international human rights framework of which Canada is a part, people are guaranteed the right to work, fair wages, safe and healthy working conditions, to form or join trade unions, an adequate standard of living, social security, food, clothing, housing, education, health care, and participation in cultural life.<sup>x</sup> From this standpoint, addressing poverty involves ensuring that the full array of rights people enjoy are realized.

In 2018, Canada adopted a national poverty strategy called Opportunity for All<sup>xi</sup> which recognized poverty as a violation of human rights. As part of the strategy, Bill C29 established the strategy in law and also set up the National Advisory Council on Poverty to advise the government on strategy implementation. Various provinces have also implemented poverty reduction strategies, along with a number of local municipalities. The ongoing implementation of the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission also informs efforts to address Indigenous poverty arising from the legacy of colonization. This forms the policy context within which the CPI exists and frames the directions in this strategic plan.

#### 4. CPI APPROACH AND PHILOSOPHY

The Canadian Poverty Institute is grounded in the Christian tradition of fostering compassion while seeking justice for the marginalized and oppressed. We affirm that all human beings are intended to flourish. Human flourishing refers to “*the good toward which humans are meant to strive*” which includes the conditions of peace (Shalom) and rest (Shabbat). For humans to flourish, there is the requirement of material and economic justice, as well as relational and spiritual wholeness. Foundational to human flourishing is the belief that all persons have dignity, worth, gifts and talents to share with those around them and with the world.<sup>xii</sup>

The condition of poverty is the opposite of flourishing. As human flourishing requires material and economic justice, poverty arises from conditions of material and economic injustice related to structures of exclusion and oppression. Exclusion and oppression undermine the dignity and worth of the individual and prevents them from realizing the conditions of peace and rest.

Poverty compromises the resilience of the community by interfering with healthy relationships. This not only deprives society of the gifts and talents of those who are marginalized, but also diminishes the potential for solidarity and collective action. As such, we understand poverty to be a social condition, not an individual one, with material, social and spiritual dimensions.

Material poverty exists where people lack the income and assets needed to thrive. Social poverty exists where people are isolated, lacking the social networks and connections necessary for resilience and inclusion in community life. Spiritual poverty exists where people lack meaning and purpose in life and their dignity is compromised. We believe that these aspects of poverty are inter-linked and cannot be addressed independent of each other.

We believe that the objective of poverty reduction work is to promote human flourishing by healing relationships that have been disrupted by systemic injustice and exploitation. This requires systemic action that establishes conditions of justice by challenging structures that marginalize people, diminish their dignity and undermine their rights. Such action must be radically inclusive, recognizing that the flourishing of individual members of the community is tied to the flourishing of the community as a whole.

#### 5. VISION

The vision of the Canadian Poverty Institute is a compassionate and just society where the material, social and spiritual wellbeing, rights and potential of all people are attained.



## 6. MISSION

The mission of the Canadian Poverty Institute is to advance the eradication of poverty in Canada through teaching, research and action that promotes systems change.

## 7. MANDATE

The mandate of the Canadian Poverty Institute is to enable key stakeholders to effectively address systemic causes of poverty by connecting knowledge to practice. In meeting our vision, mission and mandate, we work collaboratively with stakeholders from across Canada including:

- People with lived experience of poverty, marginalization and oppression;
- All orders of government;
- Civil society organizations;
- Academic institutions;
- The business community;
- All concerned citizens.

## 8. PRINCIPLES

The following principles guide the work and decisions of the Canadian Poverty Institute.

- **Prioritizing the voice of lived experience:** We believe that those with a lived experience of an issue are the first experts of it. We value that and deliberately incorporate this input into our work.
- **Rights-based:** We understand poverty to be a violation of a person’s economic, social and cultural rights.
- **Anti-oppressive:** We work to dismantle systems of oppression and affirm the right of people to live free of domination of any kind, including on the basis of gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, race and ethnicity, ability and age.
- **Inclusive:** We strive to make our work free of discrimination and create a sense of belonging for people with diverse perspectives.
- **Inter-disciplinarity:** We predicate our research on knowledge from various disciplines because we recognize that anti-poverty work intrinsically cuts across knowledge divides.

- **Systems-change:** We work to identify and remove barriers, bridge gaps and enhance processes in anti poverty work.
- **Equity:** We strive to create conditions that enable people to achieve their material, social and spiritual wellbeing, particularly those who have been marginalized and oppressed.

## 9. GOALS AND FOCUS AREAS

Based on our vision, mission, and mandate, we situate our work within broad goals and focus areas. The goals identify the broad results the CPI expects to realize at the end of the strategic period, whilst the focus areas are the mediums through which the goals will be pursued and/or attained. The focus areas are foundational pieces of the work of the CPI as an integral part of Ambrose University. Ambrose University has a strong focus on teaching and an emergent research community. Ambrose University is also strongly associated with community service, inspiring the CPI’s focus on practice.

### Goals

Over the next 5 years (2023-2028), the goals of the Canadian Poverty Institute (CPI) are to:

1. Promote effective evidenced-based interventions for the systemic eradication of poverty;
2. Develop leaders and practitioners who are knowledgeable and skilled in poverty reduction;
3. Inform the general public about the root and inter-related causes and impacts of poverty;
4. Equip relevant stakeholders with the capacity to effectively reduce poverty; and
5. Center the voices of people with lived experience of poverty in dialogue and decision-making.



## Focus Areas

The CPI aims to achieve these goals through the inter-related focus areas of research, teaching and practice:

- a) Research.** Research is based on the range of work of the Institute and is categorized as academic research, applied research and research within evaluation.
- The CPI will use research as a vehicle for holistic interaction with poverty issues, people affected by poverty and those seeking to address poverty from various perspectives including practitioners, students, and interns.
- b) Teaching.** Teaching involves extending understandings of poverty informed by research and practice for students, non-profit organizations, and all interested parties from across Canada.
- The CPI will use teaching as a way to educate, engage and raise awareness around poverty.
- c) Practice.** Practice involves the advancement of evidence-informed work with governments, civil society and non-profit organizations, and businesses to promote the eradication of poverty in Canada.
- The CPI will use practice to engage with practical problems in anti-poverty work, social services work and similar interventions. This is to enable more efficient and effective processes and systems for people on the frontlines of poverty prevention or the assistance of people living with poverty on a low-income .



## 10. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The CPI will use an Institutional Framework to ground our work. The framework is founded on robust community engagement through research, teaching and practice. This foundation will embed voices of people with lived experience of various poverties to shape the CPI's contributions to programs, policy and systems analysis, and every effort will be made to include these perspectives in the dialogues that shape the CPI's anti-poverty work.

Through this framework, we will incorporate learnings, findings, insights, into bold narratives and recommendations about poverty, poverty dimensions and anti-poverty practice.

Central to the work of the CPI is the belief in inclusive and equitable work and environments in which this work can be and/or should be done. Thus, the Institutional Framework foregrounds work that draws both from the community level to the paradigm change level and vice versa.

As poverty is a multidimensional, power-laden issue, with a high chance of excluding marginalized voices, we will intentionally work from a "bottom-up" approach to embrace, advocate for, and democratize our anti-poverty work.

This positioning is expected to help enable all members of the community to participate in the Canadian Poverty Institute's work, so that the ultimate missions of individual and community flourishing can be reached.

By using this framework with intent, and ingraining it in CPI practice, we foster the vision of a society where the material, social and spiritual wellbeing, rights and potential of people are attained. This also promotes the Ambrose University value of human dignity, with every person worthy of dignity and respect, regardless of their story.

## 11. CONCLUSION

The Canadian Poverty Institute is invested in the eradication of poverty in Canada. We believe in the imperative of systems-level work and paradigm change to bring transformation to the lives of people living in various poverties, whether chronically or episodically.

The Canadian Poverty Institute further believes in the power of collaboration to bring about broad change. As an anti-oppressive organization, we are witnesses to the power of empathy in drawing out testimonies that should have a bearing on what programs, policies and systems look like.

Over the next 5 years, we commit to stay true to this Strategic Plan in order to deepen the roots of the CPI as it works with stakeholders to leave a recognizable footprint in the poverty eradication space.



## END NOTES

<sup>i</sup> Statistics Canada. 2016. Census of Canada.

<sup>ii</sup> Government of Canada. 2010. Federal Poverty Reduction Plan: Working In Partnership Towards Reducing Poverty In Canada. Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Ottawa: Government of Canada.

<sup>iii</sup> Gaetz, S., J. Donaldson, T. Richter and T. Gulliver-Garcia. 2013. The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013. Toronto: The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness.

<sup>iv</sup> Ross, C. 2011. “Collective Threat, Trust and the Sense of Personal Control.” *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour* 52, no. 3 (September).

<sup>v</sup> Mikkonen, J., & Raphael, D. 2010. *Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts*. Toronto: York University School of Health Policy and Management.

<sup>vi</sup> Anasuri. 2017. *Ibid.*

<sup>vii</sup> Chaudry, A., & Wimer, C. 2016. Poverty is Not Just an Indicator: The Relationship Between Income, Poverty, and Child Well-Being. *Academic Pediatrics*, 16 (3 Suppl), S23–S29.

<sup>ix</sup> Hyde, L. W., Gard, A. M., Tomlinson, R. C., Burt, S. A., Mitchell, C., & Monk, C. S. 2020. An Ecological Approach to Understanding the Developing Brain: Examples Linking Poverty, Parenting, Neighborhoods, and the Brain. *American Psychologist*, 75(9), 1245–1259.

<sup>ix</sup> Government of Canada. 2018. *Opportunity for All: Canada’s First Poverty Reduction Strategy* Ottawa: Government of Canada.

<sup>x</sup> Canada Without Poverty. n.d. *Human Rights and Poverty Reduction Strategies: A Guide to International Human Rights Law and its Domestic Application in Poverty Reduction Strategies*. Ottawa: Canada Without Poverty.

<sup>xi</sup> Government of Canada. 2018. *Ibid.*

<sup>xii</sup> Reize, N., Stovell, B., & Toffelmire, C. 2021. Human Flourishing and a Theology of Poverty Alleviation, *International Journal of Public Theology*, 15(2), 177-196. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/15697320-12341653>





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