

Halifax is more equal than most cities, but has hotspots of income disparity.

A new report issued by the Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership, the Perceptions of Change Project, and United Way Halifax shows that although Halifax appears to have greater income equality than other major Canadian cities, it has 'hotspots' of low-income and inequality throughout the municipality.

Analysis of income inequality trends using Census and tax data from 1980 to 2015 across eight major Canadian cities shows that Halifax consistently had lower levels of income inequality among its neighbourhoods. It also had the least amount of income polarization. Nevertheless, it has had a shrinking middle class, with 8% fewer middle-income neighbourhoods in 2015 compared to 1980.

Between 1980 and 2015 a number of hotspots of inequality emerged throughout the municipality. Dartmouth North and aging suburban developments in Dartmouth have transitioned from middle to lower-income areas. This pattern also reflected in older parts of Clayton Park along the Bedford Highway, census tracts around Saint Mary's University, and parts of the municipality's 'rural east.' Other downward trending areas are located are found in Fairview, Spryfield, and the area around the Woodside Ferry Terminal.

Many of these areas are beside neighbourhoods with income trending upward or are beside middle or higher income areas. Howard Ramos, a political sociologist at Dalhousie University, notes that, "On the surface, Halifax looks like it doesn't suffer from income inequality compared to other Canadian cities, however, the city has a number of polarized adjacencies and people across the municipality are concerned about affordability".

The 'hotspots' of income inequality shown in the report align with neighbourhoods that United Way Halifax has identified as areas of focus. "Bringing a neighbourhood focus is an important part of United Way Halifax's work on poverty solutions," says Sue LaPierre, Director Community Impact. "We know the experience of poverty in Halifax varies when we consider urban, suburban and rural perspectives. Through our consultations, we've learned where people live and their level of income helps us understand only one aspect of poverty's impact – it is also important to consider factors like the quality of transportation, food, housing, and access to services, such as health and education," adds LaPierre.

When five lower income neighbourhoods were examined in detail it became clear that they are linked to families with children, higher rates of unemployment, lower levels of education, higher rates of renting, and a greater share of income spent on shelter. For these reasons the report concludes that the city and province need to prioritize affordable housing with units that can accommodate families.

This research is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Please contact Dr. Howard Ramos at howard.ramos@dal.ca for media inquiries or see the full report at <http://perceptionsofchange.ca/hotspotsofinequality.html>.