



**UNIVERSITY
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Social Cohesion Resource for Building Healthy Communities Companion Document: Strategies for Strengthening Social Cohesion in Albertan Communities

October 2023

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Suggested Citation

Centre for Healthy Communities. Social Cohesion Resource for Building Healthy Communities Companion Document: Strategies for Strengthening Social Cohesion in Albertan Communities. Edmonton, Alberta. October 2023. 10p. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7939/r3-c2wb-jk19>

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Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the people who provided invaluable feedback and input at any stage of the development of these resources.

The University of Alberta respectfully acknowledges that we are situated on Treaty 6 territory, traditional lands of First Nations and Métis people.

Funding

The Centre for Healthy Communities receives financial support from the School of Public Health, University of Alberta for operational activities which broadly supports the work of groups like the Social Cohesion Working Group.

This project has been generously supported with funds from the Canada Research Chairs program. Dr. Roman Pabayo is a Tier II Canada Research Chair in social and health inequities throughout the lifespan.

Luc Sauze received financial support through an award that was funded by the Suncor Energy Foundation through the Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families, School of Public Health, University of Alberta.

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Introduction

This document is a companion resource to the CHC's Social Cohesion Resource for Building Healthy Communities. It provides more detailed information on each social cohesion strengthening strategy, while also including a variety of hyperlinked stories from communities in Alberta.

Who Developed this Resource

The Centre for Healthy Communities' (CHC) Social Cohesion Working Group which includes: CHC Practice Affiliate members, CHC Scientist members (who are researchers in the School of Public Health [SPH], University of Alberta) and SPH MSc students.

Who is this Resource for

Policy-makers at the municipal and provincial government levels, health promotion practitioners, community development consultants, and community members interested in improving social cohesion.

What is Social Cohesion?

Social Cohesion refers to the level of trust and connectedness within a community.

How the Strengthening Strategies Were Developed

A literature review was conducted to identify information and resources on how to strengthen social cohesion in communities. Reviewed resources included a variety of materials, such as academic articles, community action plans, reports, frameworks, and other related documents (full list in bibliography). A thematic analysis was performed on the compiled resources to identify common themes related to ways in which social cohesion can be strengthened in communities.

How to Use this Resource

Users of this resource can choose which strategies to pursue in order to strengthen social cohesion in their community. Please note strategies are not meant to be prescriptive; rather, we encourage users of this resource to pick, adapt, and implement whichever strategies fit their community's respective needs and capacity best.

Each strategy in this resource includes a 'What' subsection introducing the actions to adopt, a 'Why' subsection explaining the relevance of such actions, and a collection of 'Ideas to Inspire' which are meant to spark thoughts, discussions, and action within communities. The Ideas to Inspire included in this resource were developed by iteratively drawing on the collective expertise, knowledge, and experience of CHC Practice Affiliates, Scientists, and other CHC affiliated Research Staff.

The hyperlinked stories highlighted in this resource are meant to serve as sources of inspiration, offering real-world examples of actions taken by communities in Alberta that align with our proposed social cohesion strengthening strategies. Please be aware that the hyperlinked stories provided do not encompass all possible examples from Alberta, but rather represent a selection of stories identified by the CHC's Social Cohesion Working Group.

Strategies for Strengthening Social Cohesion

Develop Tools for Evaluating Community Understanding of Social Cohesion

What:

Developing ways to evaluate social cohesion at the community level (e.g., municipality or neighbourhood) involves creating tools, frameworks, and methodologies to help community members, organizations, and local governments better understand and assess the degree of social cohesion within their given community.

Why:

1. **Promotes Understanding:** Developing resources on social cohesion can help community members better understand what social cohesion is and how it can benefit their community. This can promote a shared understanding of why social cohesion is important to foster in the community.
2. **Builds Local Capacity:** By providing resources and tools to measure social cohesion at the community level, local organizations and governments can build capacity to address issues related to social cohesion. This can help by identifying areas where improvements to social cohesion are needed and inform the development of policies and programs to address them.
3. **Supports Evidence-Based Approaches:** Developing resources on how to measure social cohesion at the community level can help support evidence-based approaches to addressing social cohesion issues (e.g., lack of mutual trust, social isolation)). Essentially, being able to accurately measure social cohesion within the community can help to ensure that interventions (e.g., programs, initiatives, or policies) are targeted and effective at strengthening it.

Ideas to Inspire:

- Engage community members in participatory citizen science to help assess social cohesion.
- Provide training opportunities (e.g., workshops) on social cohesion resources for community members and staff.
- Use validated scales such as Buckner's [Neighbourhood Cohesion Index](#) and Sampson et al.'s [Collective Efficacy Scale](#) to assess community social cohesion.

Build Physical Infrastructure that Facilitate Bridging Between Groups and Bonding with Groups

What:

Developing physical spaces that facilitate bridging between groups and bonding within groups is an important step in strengthening community social cohesion. Physical infrastructure that creates opportunities for community members to connect, collaborate, and build relationships can help foster a stronger sense of unity and cohesion within the community.

Why:

1. **Builds Relationships and Networks:** Developing safe and accessible public spaces give community members places to build relationships and networks which, in turn, can improve social cohesion.
2. **Fosters Inclusivity:** Physical infrastructure that facilitates bridging between groups can help establish a more inclusive community where all community members feel safe and included. This can be especially important for equity-deserving groups (e.g., immigrants, people with visible and invisible disabilities) who may feel excluded or marginalized within their larger community.
3. **Generates Community Pride:** Having spaces for community members to collaborate on projects (e.g., community gardens) that revitalize and enrich their community can help cultivate a sense of communal pride and accomplishment.

Ideas to Inspire:

- Repurpose derelict or empty spaces into community gardens (e.g., [City of Edmonton Pop-up Community Gardens Program](#)).
- Create gathering spaces that are intergenerational-friendly, safe, aesthetically pleasing, and culturally appropriate for the specific community.
- Support communities and policy-makers in adapting bylaws and other regulations that enable and encourage such collaborative projects.
- Facilitate the application process for pop-up events in the neighbourhood, such as street parties on local roads.

Albertan Stories

- Alberta community gardens
 - [Strathmore - How to grow a community garden](#)
 - [Wembley - Bucket Garden project](#)
 - [St. Paul - Incredible Edibles](#)
- Alberta walking trails:
 - [Coronation Walking Trails](#)
- Alberta gathering spaces:
 - [Millet Distancing Diamonds](#)

Address Larger Issues of Racism, Violence, Inequality and Discrimination

What:

By acknowledging and addressing systemic issues that have historically marginalized and continue to oppress certain groups, communities can work towards building a more socially cohesive and equitable community.

Why:

1. **Promotes Social Justice:** Racism, inequality, and discrimination are major social justice issues that create conflict and erode trust and inclusiveness in the community. Addressing these systemic social justice issues is a major component of strengthening community social cohesion.
2. **Builds Trust and Unity:** By actively addressing larger issues of social inequity and discrimination, communities can foster a greater sense of unity and trust among its members. This approach aids in creating a more trusting and equitable community, which, in turn, can lead to improved social cohesion.

Ideas to Inspire:

- Meaningfully involve and support the leadership of equity-deserving groups at every step of the cohesion strengthening process.
- Develop or utilize existing [Gender-Based Analysis Plus](#) (GBA+) and similar tools (e.g., the [Wheel of Power and Privilege](#)) as a starting point when planning community projects to help decision-makers, program developers, and volunteers reflect on their own biases and privileges.

Support and Encourage Volunteerism in the Community

What:

Increasing volunteerism is an important strategy for improving social cohesion within a community. By actively supporting and encouraging volunteer participation, communities can develop a deeper sense of connection, engagement, and overall social cohesion.

Why:

1. **Addresses Community Needs:** Volunteering often involves doing work that addresses community needs and challenges. When community members come together to voluntarily work towards a shared goal, it can foster a sense of collectivism and a commitment to improving the community which, in turn, can strengthen social cohesion.
2. **Strengthens Connection to Community:** Volunteering can help individuals develop stronger relationships and connections with others in their community, which can help improve social cohesion.

Ideas to Inspire:

- Develop meaningful volunteer programs that provide training and opportunities for skill development for people of all ages and abilities.
- Review volunteer screening requirements and processes with an equity, diversity, and inclusivity (EDI) lens. When appropriate, develop alternate processes that mitigate systemic biases to ensure volunteer opportunities are accessible to all people. This may include, but is not limited to, advertising volunteer opportunities and resources online and in print, providing such materials in accessible language and print size, and offering in-kind support (e.g., training, meals, public transportation fees, childcare) that recognizes a volunteer's time, technical experience, and family dynamics.

Albertan Stories

- [Fort Edmonton- the Benefits of Volunteering](#)
- [Peace River - Volunteer Hub](#)
- [Gift Lake - Communities Remember](#)

Recognize and Celebrate Local Diversity Through Art, Community Events and Festivals

What:

Recognizing and celebrating local diversity through art, community events, and festivals is important for strengthening social cohesion as it provides an opportunity for community members of different socio-cultural backgrounds to come together, share their traditions and heritage, and learn from one another.

Why:

1. **Promotes Understanding and Respect:** Initiatives that recognize and celebrate local diversity help to promote understanding and respect for other cultures within the community, contributing to the creation of a collective community identity and increased social cohesion.

Ideas to Inspire:

- Provide funding for community heritage organizations to share their social values, traditions, and foods with a larger local community audience.
- Promote cultural participation through in-person and online events on artworks from different local generations and descendants from other cultures.

Albertan Stories

- [Edson - Celebrating Diversity](#)
- [Red Deer - Paint the Town Positive](#)

Grow Community-Led Organizations and Collaborative Local Leadership

What:

Growing collaborative local leadership and community-led organizations helps strengthen social cohesion by building capacity for cooperative community-driven problem-solving and decision-making. By empowering local leaders and organizations, communities can become more capable of addressing their specific needs and priorities.

Why:

1. **Fosters Community Cooperation:** Collaborative local leadership and community-led organizations can promote cooperation among community members by encouraging collective participation in decision-making processes. In turn, this can help create a sense of investment in the community and strengthen social cohesion.
2. **Empowers Local Voices:** Growing collaborative local leadership and community-led organizations can help ensure diverse perspectives and voices are represented in community decision-making processes. By empowering local voices, community members, including those from equity-deserving groups, can play an active role in shaping their community into a more socially cohesive place.

Ideas to Inspire:

- Support community leaders and organizations in hosting gatherings or communities of practice that bring community members together to identify solutions to communal challenges.
- Share successful stories of work done by local community leaders and organizations through local news and social media.

Albertan Stories

- [Crossfield - Planners and Doers](#)
- [Stettler - Finding Your People](#)
- [Hanna - Relationships are the Greatest Asset](#)
- [Hanna - Library of Things](#)

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