CCMARD: A MODEL FOR COLLABORATIVE SOCIAL CHANGE

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CCMARD has existed for a decade and has realized significant achievements. It has helped build awareness about racism and discrimination in communities, placed attention on the opportunities and strategies available to respond to it, and created a network of members and partners all concerned with addressing inequities. This tenth anniversary provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the challenges in mobilizing communities that are not yet engaged, strengthening work already being done, and ensuring the continuation of the coalition as a whole.

Municipalities that have signed onto the Coalition have faced varying challenges in moving the work forward in their communities and have demonstrated varying levels of engagement with the Coalition. Just as a national initiative such as CCMARD is not, in and of itself, sufficient to eliminate racism and discrimination, a municipality signing onto the Coalition is not, in and of itself, a sufficient action to address racism and discrimination in a local community. A continuing high priority is for every member municipality to develop and implement its own distinctive plan, responsive to its own needs, and leading to tangible outcomes. Reducing and eliminating racism and discrimination is complex, long-term work that does not always deliver immediate results. It requires a systems perspective, recognizing that racism and discrimination are manifestations of complex, multi-sectoral, and interconnected issues reflecting various inequities. In Alberta, some of the strongest results were demonstrated when CCMARD efforts were integrated with other efforts, particularly in the social planning area, working with vulnerable and marginalized communities. Embedding this work into one or more departments within a municipality, engaging with communities on this work, and embracing a systems perspective is likely to lead to both increased sustainability and significant outcomes.

Effective social change requires a commitment at all levels. The example that some member municipalities point to is the benefit of having both a political champion among elected officials to galvanize and energize the community, as well as working level champions to do the heavy lifting. There is a need to continue to identify and recruit champions locally, provincially, and nationally, who can act as leverage points to engage across their spheres of influence.

The inclusion of the terms "racism" and "discrimination" in the name of the Canadian Coalition was deliberate, recognizing that barriers to full participation in society are experienced across all types of diversity. The emphasis in some jurisdictions during the Coalition's first decade has been on building welcoming and inclusive communities focusing on ethno-cultural diversity and barriers, in part due to economic drivers related to immigration. Broadening efforts to include discrimination related to multiple dimensions of diversity could support greater inclusiveness across a range of vulnerable or marginalized communities.

Sharing knowledge, strategies and expertise is critical in building the "coalition" within municipalities and among municipalities and partners. The more engaged the network of municipalities and partners, the greater the opportunity to identify needs, access resources, knowledge and expertise, share and learn from each other, secure support, build overall capacity, and develop tangible outcomes.

The partnership in Alberta between the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and the Alberta Human Rights Commission is a unique model in Canada. With dedicated resources and staffing, the Welcoming and Inclusive Communities (WIC initiative) championed CCMARD in Alberta, and built a network to exchange knowledge and ideas, identified and developed needed tools and resources, built capacity, identified promising practices, supported collaboration across issues and regions, and developed an evaluative tool that communities can use to track and monitor their efforts. The model points to the benefits of an effective partnership in supporting coalition-building.

Moving forward into CCMARD's next decade, it would be helpful to establish a collaborative governance model that supports this dynamic and complex network of diverse members and partners working together. There needs to be consensus on where responsibility, authority and accountability rest for shaping the agenda and moving it forward. Ideally, a governance model can be identified that supports CCMARD's collaborative efforts to reduce racism and discrimination and enables these efforts to be integrated with other social change initiatives addressing related inequities. If we are to move CCMARD forward, we need to continue to build momentum, achieve traction, and sustain the work over time. Issues include maintaining the energy and engagement of current members and securing new members, working through resource challenges, and continuing the commitment to the work in the face of competing priorities. Our challenge will be to keep the spotlight on this important work, recognize and celebrate the work done by member municipalities, and be intentional about our collaborative efforts to work on an agenda of social change through the efforts of the broader coalition.