



**Attention News/Assignment/Photo Editors:**

**MEDIA RELEASE – Reports provide wake-up call on future of Canada’s cities**

**March 23** / ‘Social inclusion’ reports were released today in five cities – Saint John, Toronto, Burlington, Edmonton and Vancouver. They are the work of *Inclusive Cities Canada*, a unique, participatory research initiative that uses a social inclusion framework to build people-friendly cities, promote good urban governance and develop strategies for supporting urban diversity.

The federally-funded initiative set up Civic Panels made of community and municipal leaders to conduct social inclusion ‘audits’. Over 1,000 participants contributed to the findings. The research examined important dimensions of social inclusion, such as how cities respond to diversity, levels of civic engagement, living conditions, opportunities for human development and community services. “Our research used a place-based approach to social inclusion to indicate what is working; what isn’t and what can be done,” says Edmonton City Councillor and the initiative’s national co-chair Michael Phair.

While the cities in the study differed in location and size, consistent themes emerged. The reports document growing income polarization and the marginalization of vulnerable peoples. In the largest centres a racialized pattern of economic inequality is evident. “These indicate a need for national solutions to strengthen urban foundations, support diverse communities and address social disparity,” concludes Amanuel Melles, co-chair of the Toronto civic panel, along with Toronto city councillor, Pam McConnell.

“Canada’s urban strategy needs to expand beyond addressing transit and decaying water systems,” says Dr. Joey Edwardh, co-chair of the national initiative and of the Burlington civic panel, along with Mayor Rob MacIsaac. “Growing urbanization, combined with Canada’s dependence on immigration compels us to address the implications”. “A social inclusion framework can both assess and shape the mix of community services that provide social stability and advance development within cities”, adds Peter Clutterbuck, research consultant to Inclusive Cities Canada.

“The findings are a wakeup call for policy makers and residents of the growing gaps in our communities and a reminder that no one is immune to the consequences,” says Michael Phair.

Of positive note, researchers also found a universal desire by participants to make their cities work. “The participants view diversity as an asset and reject gated communities that keep people with differences out. They appreciate the contributions made by public institutions and services such as schools, libraries, parks and recreation to urban vibrancy and see their local governments as largely accessible,” National Coordinator, Christa Freiler observed.

Inclusive Cities Canada is intended to support civic capacity to build inclusive communities; secure a stronger voice for urban communities in national social policy and ensure that voices of diversity are recognized as core Canadian ones

The reports will be tabled with their respective city councils, school boards and community organizations. The findings from the five sites will also be shared at a national roundtable to be held in Ottawa on June 2, 2005. The roundtable will develop recommendations for the provincial and federal government.

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The five city reports, background information and executive summaries are available on [www.inclusivecities.ca](http://www.inclusivecities.ca).