

Alberta's Social Policy Framework (Phase 2 proposed Strategies, Roles and Responsibilities)

Submission from the Edmonton Social Planning Council
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Note to the Reader: In this document, we have added our phase 2 submission (i.e. Strategies, Roles and Responsibilities) in *black colour* text. We have also retained the text from our original phase 1 submission (i.e. vision, outcomes and principles) but faded it to a *light grey colour*. Also, under the Roles and Responsibilities section, we have significantly modified what the government had put forward. Our changes are in *black colour* while the government's suggestions are in *light grey colour*.

Roles and Responsibilities

Individuals:

Responsible for their own well-being **within their capacity**. Fulfilling one's full potential and participating in society is dependent on personal choices, beliefs and behaviour, **acknowledging the influences of peers, teachers, community leaders and access to government supports when necessary**.

Families:

Responsible for the well-being of their own members, particularly children and the elderly. It is a reasonable assumption that while there are exceptions, families will care for and look after their own, **with the help of community and government supports where necessary**.

Neighbourhoods and Communities:

Contribute to and have a responsibility for ~~individual and~~ community well-being **by organizing sports and social activities for children, youth and adults through local fund collection and municipal contribution**.

Non-profit and Voluntary Sector:

- Provides opportunities for participation in society through volunteering, participating in activities or programming;
- In some instances delivers social services and supports funded in part by governments;
- Provides a place for individuals and communities to identify and act on their priorities;
- **Conducts research on social issues, informs public through forums and influences government policy and priorities.**

Private Sector:

- Contributes to the quality of life and economic status of the business, individuals, families, and communities;
- Creates opportunities for paid work and social interaction, thereby influencing how people spend their time;
- Recognizes that a productive workforce is dependent on the health, safety, education and well-being of the population;
- **Invests in employees through skills training and a safe work environment.**

Intermediary Organizations (provincial associations, foundations, other funders, etc.):

Play a role in convening groups around shared interests, providing funding and building system capacity for problem-solving.

Local Governments:

- Play a role in promoting social, economic and cultural well-being of local communities;
- **Provide municipal services including transportation, utilities, parks, recreation, policing and emergency services to its residents;**
- **Operate local housing and social service projects jointly funded by the provincial government.**

Provincial Government:

- Demonstrates leadership, makes policy decisions, sets standards and delivers services and support either directly or indirectly (through contracts with third parties);
- **Provides income support to seniors, persons with disabilities and Albertans whose income is inadequate to meet basic needs; and provides child protection and safety where necessary;**
- **Provides predictable and adequate funding for public services including health, education, children, seniors, immigrants, persons with disabilities, and affordable housing.**
- **Regulates and monitors worker safety, environmental standards, professional and trade standards, employment standards, resource**

development, educational policy, health services, disaster services and the minimum wage;

- **Monitors labour force requirements and implements immigration and temporary foreign workers policy jointly with the Federal Government;**
- **Adequately shares tax revenue with the Municipal Governments to ensure that they are able to provide the mandated services to their community.**

Federal Government:

- Responsible for fiscal transfers to provinces (such as the Canada Health Transfer and Equalization) and targeted programs and services that support Canadians (such as Old Age Security, Employment Insurance, and the Canada Child Tax Benefit);
- Lead responsibility for policies related to immigration and relations with First Nations;
- **Provides adequate funding for services including income support, health, education, and housing for Aboriginal people living on First Nations.**

Strategies

Working Poor and the Unemployed:

1. Extend the current Alberta Family Employment Tax Credit (AFETC) program to “singles” and childless couples to reward work and to meet the Premier’s commitment to reduce poverty overall.
2. Increase Alberta’s minimum wage from \$9.75 to \$10.25 per hour in order to reward work of the working poor. (NB: Single parents form a major portion of Alberta’s working poor).
3. Implement a living wage for publicly contracted services to improve job recruitment and retention.
4. Set benefit levels for the Alberta Works program at the level based on the Low Income Measure (after tax) to help meet basic needs.
5. Enhance the earnings exemption policy under the Alberta Works program by raising the exempt amount from the current 25% to 35%, with the increased portion set aside in the client’s name and the cumulative amount made available when the client leaves Alberta Works; this will help them start independence with a built up asset.
6. Provide Temporary Foreign Workers with a pathway to permanent residency to meet the long-term labour shortage in the service industry.

Children and Families:

1. Introduce an Alberta Child Tax Benefit for low-income families with children – complementing the Canada Child Tax Benefit – to meet the Premier’s commitment to eliminate child poverty in Alberta.
2. Develop an across-ministry strategic plan for early childhood development (including pre-natal care, parent training and pre-crisis counseling).
3. Establish more affordable childcare spaces to facilitate parents remain attached to employment and to promote social inclusion. (NB: This is in keeping with the recent commendable increase in income cut-off for receiving childcare subsidies).
4. Enhance drug prevention programs in schools for youth with drug addiction reduction targets.
5. Enhance family violence and bullying initiatives through community education, anger management training and support services for children who have witnessed or experienced family violence or bullying.
6. Initiate a voluntary nutritious hot lunch program in kindergarten and elementary schools to ensure that children are able to focus on education.

Aboriginal Albertans:

1. Place greater emphasis on skills training and securing jobs for Aboriginal people to meet the provincial labour shortage and to facilitate their participation in the labour market.
2. Negotiate with the federal government to ensure that all Aboriginal people have access to services, with the same rights and requirements as other Albertans.
3. Provide more support for indigenous mentorship programs.

Seniors:

1. Index the Alberta Seniors Benefit to the annual cost of living in order to ensure that no senior lives in poverty.

2. Create an Alberta Family Caregiver Tax Credit to complement the Canada Family Caregiver Tax Credit in order to support family members caring for a dependent senior.
3. Ensure that seniors who live below the poverty line have access to affordable supportive housing, home care, continuing care, long-term care and community services. Establish performance indicators and report publicly.
4. Increase funding for home care services in order to assist seniors remain in their home, and ensure that the subsidy for home care follows the senior.
5. Establish a paid family leave from employment to remain home to care for a dependent family member or to care for sick loved ones.
6. Appoint a Senior's Advocate responsible to the Legislature in order to ensure fair and easier access to programs and services.

Albertans with a Disability:

1. Adjust annually the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) benefit to the cost of living to ensure that no Albertan with a disability falls into poverty. (NB: This is in keeping with the recent benefit increase Alberta gave to the AISH recipients).

Housing and Homelessness:

1. Fund adequately the Alberta 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness to continue with the progress on the issue of homelessness. This includes reinstating investment in new and renovated affordable housing, and preventing homelessness by fully funding rent supplements for qualifying households.
2. Create an Office of the Social Auditor to monitor issues of child poverty, incarceration, crime rates, homelessness, family violence, addiction and mental health, with the Social Auditor reporting to Alberta Legislature.
3. Establish more student housing, and daycare assistance on campus for students with children.

Health Care:

1. Extend Alberta Adult Health Benefit (similar to Alberta Child Health Benefit) to all low-income and working poor Albertans so that they do not have to come on income support to get this benefit.

2. Ensure that the health care system is comprehensive and includes preventive measures both for physical and mental health. (Preventive measures include safeguard from preventable injury, food security, habitable housing, physical fitness, health diet, stress management, and focused education and information).
3. Promote Fitness and Health program at elementary and high schools.
4. Set up a system to collect all prescription information on Albertans, and link physicians, patients, pharmacists and provincial payers.
5. Ensure that all Albertans are aware of health services and benefits available to them, with an easy process to access them; and establish an Office of Health Advocate (reporting to the Premier's Office) to ensure that Albertans have access to an independent body to settle their access concerns.
6. Fund adequately a community based support system for persons with mental health problems, including supervision of their medications, and access to adequate food and housing.

Skills Training and Education:

1. Eliminate fees for post-secondary skills training for the first two years of college to meet Alberta's labour shortage and to prepare Alberta's workforce for the future economy.
2. Eliminate school fees from kindergarten to Grade 12 in order to ensure full participation by all children in school programs.
3. Initiate jointly with school boards, programs that increase high school completion – both for those still in school and for those who have already dropped out – with effective counseling, student-directed tutoring, adequate funding and other necessary supports.
4. Provide a subsidy of \$1,000/year over 4 years for every high school student to use when they go to college or university. The subsidy for students from low-income families should be \$1,500/year over 4 years.
5. Amend the Student Loan repayment policy so that repayment is based on a schedule determined on earnings after graduation, with no repayment in years of low income. Lower interest rates on provincial student loans to match private institution rates of prime plus 1% (floating) and prime plus 2% (fixed).

6. Develop initiatives to increase the number of male students attending post-secondary institutions (college, university and technical/vocational).

Delivery of Services:

1. Develop a “Single-Point-of-Entry” for all programs and services, with a single application to avoid duplicated efforts and collecting the same tombstone information only once. Compatible policies and eligibility criteria must be coordinated between programs and services so that the common goal is to serve the client. (N.B.: A *Single Point of Entry* is different from a *One Window Shopping*).
2. Manage closely related issues through one “broad initiative”, instead of through several “narrow programs” each program dealing with only one aspect of the issue. Introduce “Budgeting-by-Initiative” mechanism and fund the Initiative as a whole instead of funding separate Programs in order to achieve results for all the components of the problem and in order to avoid the silo mentality.

*(Example: For the initiative of eliminating child poverty, new funds and its accountability should **not** be assigned to separate individual programs **but** to the broad umbrella of the initiative, and the program mechanisms should be used simply for the delivery of services).*

3. Set “standards” for all initiatives, programs and services with community input.
4. Set “outcome measures” for all initiatives, programs and services jointly with the community leaders. Monitor “outcome” of all programs and services annually, whether delivered directly by government or by an outside agency, and report findings publicly.
5. Using an approach modeled on the 10 Year Homeless Plan, set targets and timelines for the Social Policy Framework strategies.

Vision

Within the next decade, all Albertans will share the highest quality of life in Canada through equitable access to:

- basic necessities (including nutritious food, housing and utilities, clothing and transportation);
- essential health supports (including physical and mental, curative and preventive, diagnosis and medication);
- affordable good quality childcare (including out of school childcare);

- high standard schooling in a safe environment (with individualized teacher support and safe from drugs and bullying);
- fair, stress free and safe workplace;
- a living wage from a job; and
- sufficient training to develop to individual capacity and reach individual potential.

Alberta's vision will be achieved through provincial government leadership and through preventive as well as remedial solutions developed in partnership with businesses, employers, non-profit agencies, voluntary sector, educators, labour and professional organizations, community leagues, municipalities, aboriginal groups and the federal jurisdiction.

The vision will be sustained through remedial as well as preventive solutions, and through mechanisms (such as application of Jordan's Principle) that eliminate jurisdictional disputes whether they are between programs, providers or funders.

Alberta's Social Policy Framework developed with publicly defined ten-year goals, strategies, outcome targets and timelines – patterned along the lines of Alberta's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness – will ensure its success and achievement.

Outcomes

1. No Albertan will lack adequate food, shelter, clothing, transportation and the necessary health supports including medication.
2. Each child will have equitable access to an early learning centre (which is more than daycare), a drug-free school, and a high standard of education from kindergarten to two-year post-secondary job skill training (excluding university) at no cost or fees.
3. All seniors will have equitable access to a continuum of programs and services that are affordable without requiring to dispose of their personal assets, and that meet at least the level and standard of living set publicly.
4. All Albertans will have equitable access to comprehensive health services (both mental and physical, preventive and remedial) that is fully publicly funded, publicly administered and delivered effectively and efficiently under government supervision.
5. Aboriginal Albertans will have access to skills training so that they can fill jobs in Alberta's future diversified economy before there is a need for temporary foreign workers.

6. Albertans with a disability will be supported with adequate income, job training and social programs.
7. Incentives and supports will be introduced to make work pay and help the working poor remain attached to the labour market.
8. Child poverty will be eliminated and overall poverty will be reduced significantly within a decade with measurable goals set for each year.
9. Child abuse (mental and physical), youth homelessness and domestic violence will be eliminated through preventive programs and services.
10. Impacts of boom and bust will be smoothed out, particularly in relation to rental housing and employment. (Comment: Research has shown that domestic violence increases during economic boom and bust changes).
11. Albertans will access through a Single Point of Entry all supports and services administered by various programs, ministries and delivery agencies in order to avoid silo and turf protection.
12. Standards for programs and services will be set publicly and reviewed periodically.
13. Outcome measures for programs and services will be developed and publicly monitored whether they are delivered by government department or authority, or by for-profit or non-profit delivery agency.
14. Budget will be allocated by initiative (Budgeting-by-Initiative) instead of by program in order to avoid silo-protection and redirecting of funds to other program priorities.

*(Example: For the initiative of eliminating child poverty, new funds and its accountability should **not** be assigned to separate individual programs **but to the broad umbrella of the initiative, and the program mechanisms should be used simply for the delivery of services).***
15. No user-fee will be applied for essential services, however, for non-essential services publicly acceptable means test using the most current income will be applied to assess eligibility and co-pay.

Principles

- Encourage healthier, socially just and inclusive communities.

- Treat each Albertan with dignity and respect regardless of his or her income status, personal barrier, physical appearance, linguistic limitation or cultural background.
- Promote wider acceptance by making programs and services universal.
- Encourage initiative not dependence, cooperation not competition, inclusiveness not turf-protection, and compassion not selfishness.
- Reward staff for effort and client improvement, not simply for completion and case closure.
- Provide tax incentive to employers who continuously train and develop employees.
- Design policies and procedures in partnership with employers, community leaders, delivery agencies and academics.
- All Albertans will have equal access to and support for building a sustainable livelihood (financial assets, savings and source of financial security).