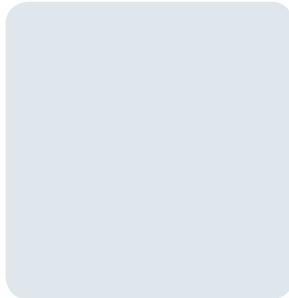


Keeping Communities Safe

Report and Recommendations



Alberta's Crime Reduction and
Safe Communities Task Force

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
ALBERTA

September 27, 2007

Honourable Ron Stevens, QC
Deputy Premier
Minister of Justice and Attorney General
208 Legislature Building
10800 – 97th Avenue N.W.
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Stevens:

As members of Alberta's Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to address an issue that is of growing concern to individual Albertans, to families and to communities across the province.

In the past six months, we met with hundreds of Albertans, visited communities from High Level in the north to Lethbridge in the south, listened to heartfelt stories about the impact of crime, saw first hand how devastating that impact can be and heard about some exciting actions already being taken to keep our communities safe. We also learned about related research from across Canada and around the world. All of this information, discussion and advice helped shape the recommendations in our report.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all of the people who participated and shared their ideas, emotions and hopes with us. In typical Alberta fashion, people did not hold back on either their concerns about crime and safety or their ideas about what needs to be done.

As we note in our report, we see our recommendations as an opportunity to make a positive difference in the lives of many Albertans. Change cannot and will not happen overnight nor can we expect quick fixes to result in immediate reductions in crime. What we need is a strong commitment, backed up by a province-wide strategy and concerted actions targeted at reducing and preventing crime across this province.

As people told us throughout our consultations, the responsibility for reducing crime and making Alberta a safer place belongs to all of us. In our individual and family lives, in our businesses, workplaces, schools and communities, there are steps we can all take to tackle crime and keep our communities safe. Albertans, and especially our children, deserve nothing less.

Sincerely,

(original signed)

Heather Forsyth, MLA Calgary-Fish Creek
Chair, Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force

(original signed)

Michael J. Boyd, C.O.M.
Chief of Police, Edmonton Police Service

(original signed)

Dr. Chester R. Cunningham, C.M., A.O.E., L.L.D.

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Susan D. Hughson, Q.C.
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Alderman, City of Calgary

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Reeve, Clearwater County

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Wayne Renke
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Jennifer Scheible
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Karen Venables
Director, DEVIN Foundation

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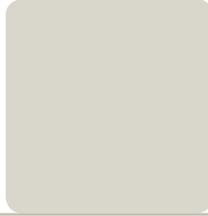
Executive summary

There are two sides to the Alberta story on crime and safety.

On the one hand, there's a dark story many Albertans may not want to hear about or acknowledge. Our crime rates are higher than the rates in many other provinces in Canada. Violent crime continues to be a serious problem. Crime isn't confined to the larger centres but affects virtually every community, large and small, all across the province.

Over the past six months, our Task Force learned that:

- Crime is having a serious impact on our quality of life. It's hurting everyone: our families, our children, our elderly, our disadvantaged and vulnerable people. It causes Albertans to worry about safety in their homes, neighbourhoods and communities. Something needs to be done.
- Crime touches far too many people. We heard heartfelt stories from a young six year old worried about gangs and graffiti, from parents of youths killed by senseless violence, police dealing with escalating drug use and abuse, and Aboriginal communities struggling with the devastating impact of crime, poverty, alcohol and drug addictions and the proliferation of gangs. All of these stories are real and they need to be addressed.
- Drug and alcohol abuse takes a terrible toll and, directly or indirectly, it is at the heart of many crimes. The "work hard, play hard" culture that has developed in Alberta is a dangerous one. It's more than just the abuse of alcohol and drugs – it's the attitude that excessive drinking and the recreational use of drugs are acceptable in our society. That attitude has to change. The negative effect spreads beyond the individuals involved to their families and to the entire community. And drugs are the basic bread and butter for gangs and organized crime in the province.
- The current criminal justice system is not working. People are working hard and some new approaches are producing good results. But we're not meeting Albertans' expectations. They expect offenders to be dealt with quickly and appropriately. They expect the most serious offenders to get punishment that fits the crime. They expect people – especially young people – with addictions to get treatment so they don't have to resort to crime to feed their habits. They expect their communities to be safe.



- The system is fractured – in fact, some would say it’s not really a system at all. Police, the courts, social workers, mental health workers and community agencies are working independently when they should be sharing the same objectives. People are charged and convicted of crimes while their underlying problems of drug and alcohol addictions and mental illness – problems that fuel their criminal activities – are given “band-aid” treatment at best.
- There’s a serious problem with repeat offenders. Too many of the same people are committing crimes over and over again and the system is like a revolving door. Repeat offenders are caught, charged and released, only to commit the same crimes again.
- There isn’t enough being done to prevent crime. Starting young and addressing the factors that put children and youth at risk is a proven strategy and one that will have the best results in the longer term.
- Preventing crime and improving safety isn’t something government or the courts or the police can do alone, nor will it happen overnight. Albertans need to take responsibility at all levels. This is about individuals, families and communities stepping up and recognizing that many of the factors that contribute to crime are within their own hands.

The other side of the story is much more positive. It reveals the hope, spirit and strength of Albertans combined with their genuine interest and commitment to improve our quality of life and make our communities better places to live. It’s about communities taking action, tackling problems, supporting families and achieving positive results. It’s about the provincial government supporting communities and social agencies, investing in enforcement and supporting initiatives to prevent and reduce crime. And it’s about the vast majority of families, children and youth who are engaged, productive and positive contributors to their communities and to Alberta.

Executive summary continued

How do we reconcile these two stories?

The answer is twofold.

First, we need to be tough on people who commit crimes in Alberta, especially those who commit crimes over and over again. The costs of crime are high and the impact on victims is devastating. While the majority of our criminal laws are set by the federal government, they need to hear a clear signal from Albertans that consequences for crimes should be swift, just and much more meaningful for victims, offenders and society than what we see today. Within the aspects of the criminal justice system managed by Alberta, every effort should be made to tackle the most serious and prevalent crimes, enforce our laws and reverse the trends, especially around violent crimes.

Second, and just as important, we need to get tough on the factors we know contribute directly to crime. Pure common sense – backed up by consistent research – tells us that the only way to put a substantial dent in the \$5 billion in direct and indirect costs of crime in Alberta each year is to prevent more people from committing crime in the first place. That means putting a top priority on children, youth, families and communities.

Setting priorities

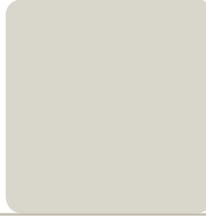
Our recommendations are intended to strike a balance between actions directed at those who commit crime and actions designed to prevent crime before it happens. The starting point is five priority areas.

Drug and alcohol addictions

Taking action to treat addictions, enforce current laws and counter Alberta's "work hard, play hard" culture, especially in rapidly growing resource-based communities, will pay off in reduced crime and safer communities.

Laws and the courts

It's time to reinforce existing laws, introduce new ones to tackle pressing issues and make sure the courts are dealing with offenders quickly and appropriately.



Families, children and youth

This is where we have the best chance of preventing crime before it happens – by supporting families, building positive skills in children and youth and getting them the support they need before they get in trouble with the law.

Policing

Police work hard in our communities to help keep us safe. They respond to crime and enforce the law. Their very presence, their involvement and commitment to communities, is also fundamental to a proactive approach for preventing crime. Not only do we need more police to deal with a growing population but we need to support their actions to improve reporting, target repeat offenders and address issues in high crime areas.

Community action

The best solutions will come when communities and community agencies work together to tackle issues in their neighbourhoods and make community safety a priority.

Recommendations

Drug and alcohol addictions

- 1. Significantly increase the number of treatment beds for alcoholism, drug addiction and a dual diagnosis of both mental illness and drug addiction**
- 2. Ensure that at-risk children, youth and young adults have access to full-time, longer-term, intense treatment for addictions and mental illnesses. This would include the expansion of the mandatory length of time children apprehended under the *Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act* can be required to remain in treatment.**
- 3. Require tougher enforcement of the current laws and regulations under Alberta's *Gaming and Liquor Act***
- 4. Develop and implement a targeted social marketing campaign to counter excessive drinking and use of drugs**

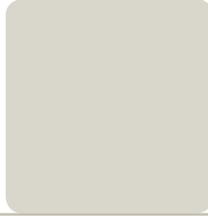
Executive summary continued

Laws and the courts

5. Expand access to specialized courts including domestic violence courts, drug treatment courts and mental health courts and increase available treatment to facilitate the coordinated approach used by these courts
6. Adopt a Safe Neighbourhoods Act expanding the powers of municipalities to tackle crime and improve safety in their communities
7. Clarify the rules and remove barriers to sharing essential information, including information about suspected criminal offences
8. Develop, enact and enforce legislation allowing the province to seize money and property gained through the proceeds of crime and use those resources to fund victim compensation, crime prevention and crime remediation programs
9. Require Crown prosecutors to be involved in bail applications before justices of the peace at the time of arrest and undertake a complete review of the current system to ensure it is meeting the needs of all stakeholders
10. Streamline the criminal justice process
11. Track and report on key indicators of the results of the criminal justice system in Alberta (e.g. use of diversion and its outcomes, delays in court proceedings, bail application results, length of sentences, breaches of court orders and the outcomes, guilty pleas to lesser charges, etc.)
12. Ensure meaningful consequences for criminal activity through closer monitoring of offenders, expanding the use of effective approaches to custody and requiring strict compliance with the conditions of release

Families, children and youth

13. Provide mandatory, early and ongoing education for children and youth to build their skills and reduce the risks of them getting involved in gangs, drugs, violence or other crime
14. Ensure that schools have access to both a school resource officer and to adequate counselling services



15. Expand provincial support for programs aimed at preventing domestic violence and providing support for families that are victims of domestic violence
16. Implement targeted pilot projects to provide comprehensive community-based services to at-risk youth and their families
17. Establish a Family Source within the provincial government to provide a central source for information, resources and community connections

Policing

18. Increase the number of police officers
19. Take targeted action to address the serious problem of repeat offenders
20. Identify and map high crime areas and support pilot projects targeted at improving safety in those “hot spots”
21. Expand the use of multi-disciplinary teams to address crises in communities
22. Take targeted action to increase the percentage of crimes that are reported
23. Establish an ongoing mechanism for municipalities to provide input into provincial policing priorities

Community action

24. Encourage all municipalities to develop and implement a safe communities strategy
25. Expand access to mental health services and treatment
26. Provide three-year provincial funding for community-based social agencies with proven outcomes
27. Adapt provincial funding formulas and criteria to reflect the impact and needs of “shadow” populations
28. Expand the current tax deduction for charitable contributions to include time spent on volunteer activities

Executive summary continued

29. Partner with Alberta’s First Nations and the federal government to jointly develop pilot projects designed to build safer communities, reduce crime and address the needs of at-risk community members

30. Fully implement the recommendations of Alberta’s Commission on Learning regarding Aboriginal education and expand initiatives aimed at improving high school completion rates for Aboriginal students

Next steps

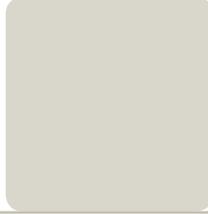
31. Establish a comprehensive, longer-term Alberta crime reduction and prevention strategy coordinated and supported by a dedicated responsibility centre within the provincial government

The top ten

The Task Force recognizes that not all of these actions can proceed at once and some will take longer to implement than others. As a first priority, we urge the provincial government to take steps to implement recommendation #31 – **to establish a longer-term, province-wide crime reduction and prevention strategy**, supported by a centralized responsibility centre. In our view, that’s the best way of ensuring continuing and deliberate action and positive results in improving safety in communities across the province.

We also recommend that the following actions should be taken on an urgent basis:

1. Significantly increase treatment beds for alcoholism, drug addiction and a dual diagnosis of both mental illness and addiction
2. Take targeted action to address the serious problem of repeat offenders
3. Streamline the criminal justice process



4. Ensure that at-risk children, youth and young adults have access to full-time, longer-term, intense treatment for addictions and mental illness problems
5. Provide mandatory, early and ongoing education for children and youth to reduce the risks of them getting involved in gangs, drugs, violence or other crime
6. Require tougher enforcement of the current laws and regulations under Alberta's *Gaming and Liquor Act*
7. Increase the number of police officers
8. Expand access to specialized courts including domestic violence courts, drug treatment courts and mental health courts
9. Partner with Alberta's First Nations and the federal government to jointly develop pilot projects designed to build safer communities, reduce crime and address the needs of at-risk community members
10. Develop, enact and enforce legislation allowing the province to seize money and property gained through the proceeds of crime and use those resources to fund victim compensation, crime prevention and crime remediation programs

Concluding comments

We are under no illusion that a report like this will eliminate all crime in our communities. Instead, we see this as an opportunity to make a positive difference in the lives of many Albertans and their families, to provide a catalyst for concerted and deliberate action to attack crime in our communities and, in the longer term, to make our communities safer places for Albertans today and in the years to come.

We urge the government to proceed with our recommendations and to establish a longer-term province-wide crime reduction strategy to tackle crime in our communities. Albertans deserve to be safe in their communities. Our quality of life depends on it. And Albertans expect nothing less.

Purpose and approach

Alberta's Task Force on Crime Reduction and Safe Communities was established by Justice Minister and Attorney General Ron Stevens, QC, in March 2007. Its mandate was straightforward: to make recommendations on effective ways to reduce crime, make Alberta's communities safer and improve public confidence in the criminal justice system.

Engaging Albertans

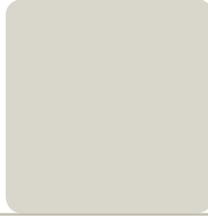
From the outset, the Task Force was committed to engaging Albertans in the process – listening to their stories, hearing about their personal experiences, learning about the many initiatives underway in communities across the province and seeking their views on what needs to be done to reduce crime and improve safety in Alberta communities.

A discussion guide and an online survey of major issues were prepared to assist in the process.

A series of 14 community workshops was held over five weeks in the spring of 2007. The input and ideas from those community sessions were summarized in a report called *What Was Heard*. Highlights of the key themes are included later in this report and the full summary is available at www.safecommunities.gov.ab.ca.

The community consultation process culminated in a two-day province-wide symposium held in Calgary on June 19 and 20. Participants at the symposium learned about successful practices in Alberta communities and in other provinces and countries, and shared their ideas on what needs to be done to reduce crime and improve safety in our communities.

Several one-on-one and small group meetings were also held with young people (including young offenders), police and members of the judiciary. The Task Force received 35 written submissions from a variety of groups, organizations and individuals across the province. (A list of submissions is included in Appendix 1.) In addition, 776 people responded to the online survey. (A summary of online survey responses is also available at www.safecommunities.gov.ab.ca.)



Understanding the facts

While Albertans have opinions and perceptions about crime and safety in their communities, it was important for the Task Force to begin with the facts. How safe are our communities? Are we seeing more crime or less? What are the key crimes affecting Albertans and our communities?

To address these questions, the Task Force examined crime statistics and trends over the past ten years. We looked at where most crimes are being committed and which crimes are on the rise in Alberta. We looked at profiles of offenders and heard especially about concerns with repeat offenders.

To set the context for the Task Force recommendations, highlights of these key facts are included in this report. More complete information on the latest crime statistics is available at www.safecommunities.gov.ab.ca.

Digging deeper

In addition to consulting with Albertans and reviewing the facts on crime, the Task Force was committed to probing deeper into the causes of crime in our communities, examining the research from around the world and grounding our recommendations in solid evidence. To assist in this process, Dr. Irvin Waller from the Institute for the Prevention of Crime at the University of Ottawa provided an extensive summary of statistics, leading national and international research and evidence on effective practices to reduce crime. The Task Force was also supported by staff from Alberta Justice and Attorney General, Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security and various other government ministries in compiling information and addressing a range of questions about current government programs and initiatives.

How safe are Alberta's communities?

Let's begin with what we know about crime in Alberta. How serious an issue is crime in our communities? Do people feel safe? What are the most common crimes affecting our communities and how do we compare with other provinces?¹

Do Albertans feel safe in their communities?

The answer generally is "yes." While people in every community we visited said there are places where people aren't safe, overall, the majority rated their own communities as fairly safe. That's backed up by a 2007 survey that showed 93 per cent of Albertans feel very or reasonably safe in their own homes after dark and 75 per cent said they feel very or reasonably safe walking alone after dark.

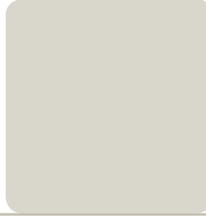
At the same time, there are definite concerns. Women, victims of crime and people in Edmonton tend to feel less safe walking after dark. More than one-third of Albertans (44 per cent) said that crime in their neighbourhood is a very serious or somewhat serious problem. More than one-third (41 per cent) said that crime had increased over the last three years. Almost 56 per cent of respondents to the Task Force's online survey indicated that crime was a high priority concern.

People in Aboriginal communities rate their communities much lower when it comes to safety. The Task Force heard tragic stories from people in Aboriginal communities about violence, the impact of drugs and alcohol, family violence and gangs.

What are the facts?

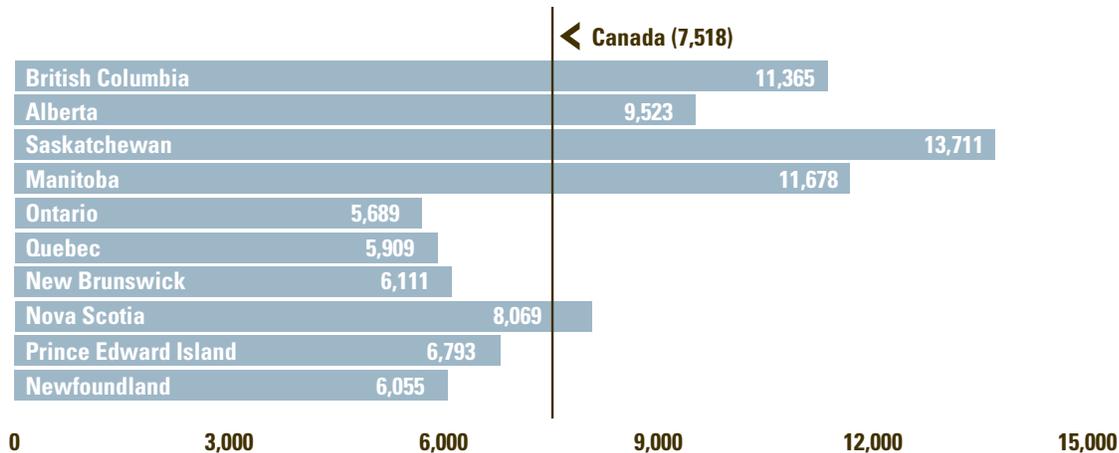
Since the Task Force's summary report was prepared in June 2007, the most recent national crime statistics (for 2006) have become available from Statistics Canada.² The latest statistics point to some positive signs. Overall, Canada's crime rate dropped to its lowest point in over 25 years and one of the largest decreases in crime was in Alberta.

However, the fact remains that Alberta has the fourth highest crime rate among Canadian provinces (2006) and our rates for violent crimes have been higher than the national average for the past 10 years.



Crime rates by province, 2006

Rate per 100,000 population



Source: Statistics Canada, Crime Statistics 2006

National crime statistics (2006) on reported crime show that:

- Alberta's total crime rate decreased by six per cent in 2006, the second largest drop among the provinces.
- The drop in Alberta's crime rate was primarily due to a significant decrease in property crimes. The violent crime rate remained the same.
- There were 96 homicides reported in Alberta in 2006, 12 fewer than 2005. Even with this drop, Alberta's homicide rate (2.84 per 100,000 population) is still the third highest among the provinces.
- The rate of assaults remained unchanged in 2006 at 888 per 100,000 people while the rate of sexual assaults dropped by 10 per cent to 64 per 100,000. (A word of caution with these numbers: The rate for sexual assaults takes into account only those assaults that are reported to the police and we know that over 90 per cent of sexual assaults in Canada go unreported.)

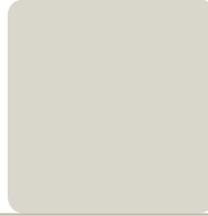
How safe are Alberta's communities? continued

- Alberta's robbery rate increased by two per cent in 2006, continuing an upward trend that started in the mid 1990s.
- The largest decrease in 2006 was in property crimes, including break-ins and thefts. Property crimes in Alberta dropped by eight per cent, driven by a 14 per cent drop in the rate of break-ins. Rates for property crimes are now at one of the lowest levels we've seen in the last 30 years.
- On the other hand, rates for motor vehicle thefts increased by 13 per cent in 2006 to 725 per 100,000 people. Alberta now has the second highest rate of motor vehicle theft among the provinces.
- Rates for drug offences dropped by one per cent in 2006 to 258 per 100,000 people. That makes Alberta's rates the fourth highest in Canada. Offences involving marijuana dropped by eight per cent while cocaine offences increased by 12 per cent. Across Canada, there has been a 67 per cent increase in cocaine offences since 2002.

More recently, there have been growing concerns with fraud, identity theft, white collar crime, and crimes involving the Internet. Aside from fraud cases, we don't have comparable information on rates of identity theft but there are indications that this is a growing issue affecting a significant number of Albertans. We heard that white collar crime (including fraud and theft from businesses) is driving up costs particularly in the retail sector. A submission to the Task Force from the Retail Council of Canada indicated that more than 20 per cent of retail companies estimated their financial losses from retail organized crime to be greater than \$500,000.

Communities are also increasingly concerned with graffiti and vandalism – crimes that affect people's homes and property, undermine pride in their communities and contribute strongly to a feeling that Alberta communities aren't as safe as they used to be. We also heard concerns about driving offences, particularly dangerous and aggressive driving and impaired driving.

The above statistics are based on police-reported data. It's important to remember that many crimes go unreported. In fact, Statistics Canada studies suggest that two thirds of all crimes (67 per cent) were not reported in Alberta in 2004. One in four Albertans said they were a victim of some type of crime in the past year and Alberta's rates of violent victimization were the highest in the country (2004). Aboriginal people are especially vulnerable to violent victimization with rates three times higher than for non-Aboriginal people and rates of homicide seven times higher than non-Aboriginal people.³

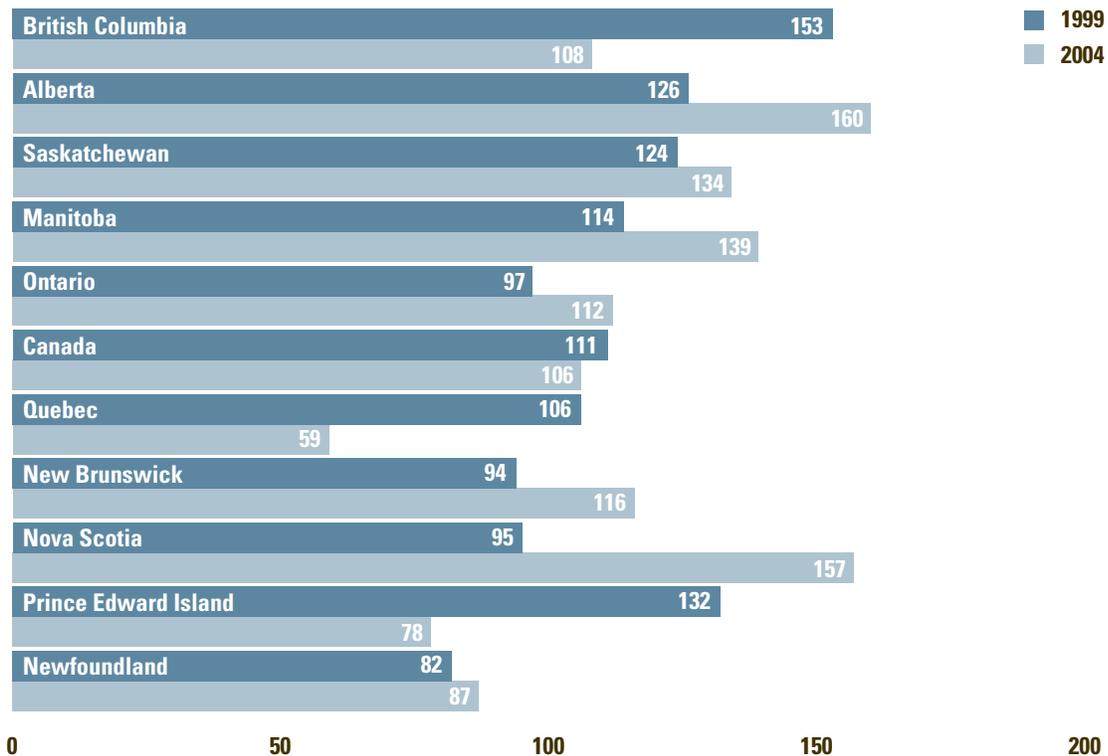


According to victimization studies, in 2004, Albertans were victims of:

- 54,000 sexual assaults
- 42,000 robberies
- 57,000 residential break-ins or attempted break-ins
- 73,000 thefts of motor vehicles or parts of vehicles
- 150,000 thefts of household property
- 315,000 assaults

Rates of violent victimization

Rates per 1,000 population age 15+

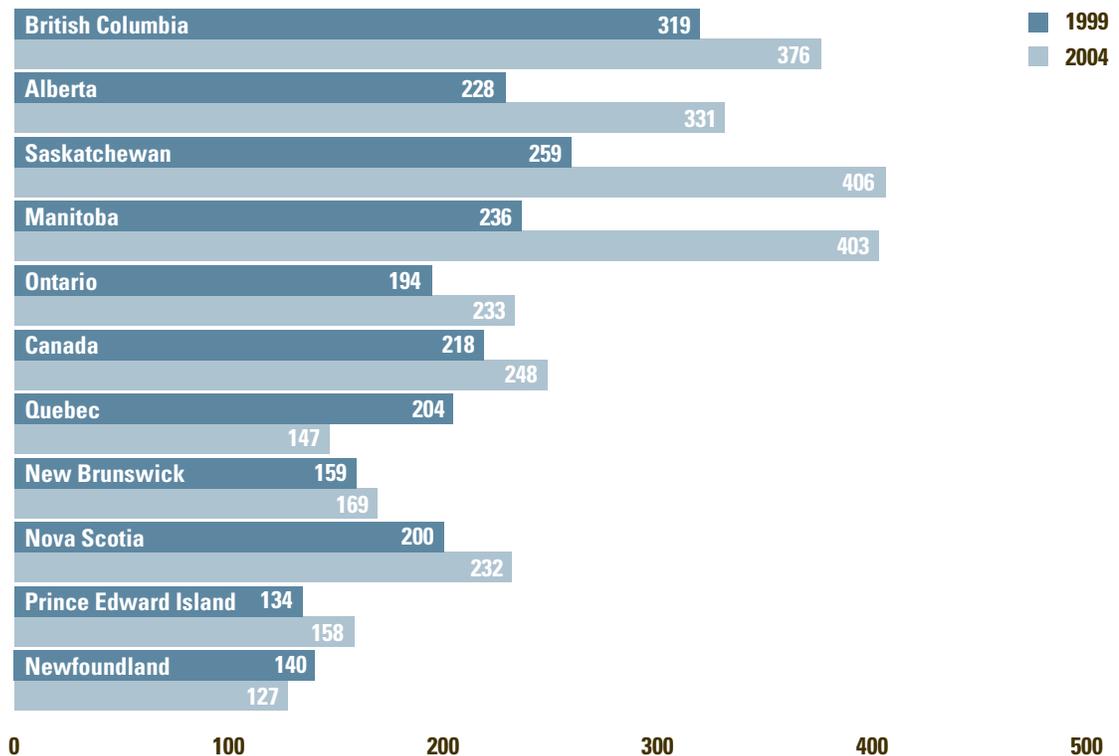


Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Victimization, 2004

How safe are Alberta's communities? continued

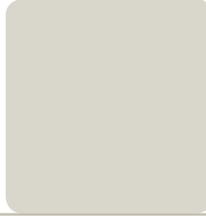
Rates of household property victimization

Rates per 1,000 households



Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Victimization, 2004

No matter how you count it, the numbers are too high and so are the costs. Total expenditure on law enforcement and criminal justice by all levels of government in Alberta is estimated at \$1.3 billion a year. Add to that the imputed costs of loss, fear, trauma and the health care costs for treating long-term physical injuries to victims of crime, and the number increases to about \$5 billion a year.



Where do most crimes occur?

If you guessed Edmonton or Calgary, think again. Smaller communities experience a substantial share of crime in Alberta.⁴ Crime is everyone's problem.

- Over a third (38 per cent) of Alberta's 96 homicides in 2006 were committed outside of Edmonton and Calgary.
- The rate of violent crimes is higher in resource-based communities (communities where the majority of employment is tied to the oil and gas or forestry industries).
- Motor vehicle theft rates in Edson, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Leduc, Red Deer and the communities around High Level, Hobbema and St. Paul were all higher than the provincial average.
- Both Edmonton and Calgary had assault rates lower than the Canadian average and well below the Alberta average.
- Banff, Hobbema and Fort McMurray had the highest rates of drug charges for locations visited by the Task Force. Drug charges in these locations were at least four times higher than the provincial average. The drug charge rates for Edmonton and Calgary were lower than the rest of Alberta.
- More than half of all reported sexual assaults in 2006 (56 per cent) occurred outside of Edmonton and Calgary.

The recent 2007 Report on Organized and Serious Crime in Alberta (Criminal Intelligence Services of Alberta, July 2007⁵) highlighted a number of problems in areas outside of Edmonton and Calgary.

- In Camrose, there has been a noticeable increase in drug-related violence; local traffickers are commonly found with edged weapons and firearms on the street.
- In Red Deer, there are serious policing concerns with domestic violence, impaired driving, identity fraud, reports of missing and runaway persons, vehicle thefts and "chop shop" operations. Street drug trafficking continues to flourish along with property and violent crimes. Many of those who sell illicit drugs are affiliated with gangs based in Edmonton and Calgary.

Throughout this report, we frequently refer to "resource-based communities." These are communities like Fort McMurray or Grande Prairie or Peace River where the economy and the employment of many of the residents are directly tied to resource industries including oil and gas or forestry. These communities are facing added pressure with rapid growth and an influx of people coming there for work.



⁴ A summary of police reported crime statistics for selected Alberta communities is included in Appendix 3.
⁵ www.cisalberta.ca

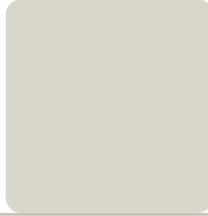
How safe are Alberta's communities? continued

"You can bury your head in the sand, but Hatters are burying their noses in cocaine. A study released this week says \$1 million worth of raw cocaine – a street value of \$2.5 million – blows through Medicine Hat every month. Police say this estimate is probably conservative. This means Hatters are spending \$2.5 million on coke each month. This isn't a small portion of our community, these are our neighbours, kids, colleagues and friends. It's no longer back-alley activity – it's right there under our noses."

Medicine Hat News
editorial, July 27, 2007

- In Lethbridge, illicit drugs are the most serious law enforcement issue, focused primarily around the distribution and use of cocaine. Some larger criminal groups based in Edmonton and Calgary have spread to Lethbridge and are recruiting young people as drug dealers. The result is significant increases in violence involving street-level criminals involved in drugs.
- The Blood and Peigan Reserves have seen an increase in street gangs identified over the past two years.
- Medicine Hat is experiencing a serious problem with illicit drugs. The CISA report indicates that more than \$1 million in cocaine – with a street value nearing \$2.5 million – is being sold by wholesalers each month in Medicine Hat.
- In Brooks, people associated with gangs are heavily involved in selling illicit drugs locally and throughout southern Alberta. Several criminally active individuals have been traced to the Toronto area.
- In Hobbema, several Aboriginal gangs are criminally active and violence continues to plague the community. Gangs are responsible for the majority of drug-trafficking (primarily crack cocaine) on reserves.
- In other parts of the province policed by the RCMP, major concerns focus primarily on drugs (cocaine followed by marijuana). In the area west of Edmonton, there is an apparent increase in medium- to large-scale marijuana growing operations.
- Gang activity has also increased across the province and there is a serious concern with motor vehicle thefts, assault (especially in communities with transient workers) and break ins. In Fort McMurray, links with a Toronto-based gang have been noted.

Looking at the two larger centres, illicit drugs are a serious concern. Cocaine continues to be readily available for purchase on the street. The production of marijuana is flourishing and appears to be destined for markets in the United States.



Who commits crime in Alberta?

The best answer is the same people, over and over again. Across Canada, 15 per cent of offenders (identified as repeat offenders) are responsible for about 50 – 60 per cent of all offences. Anecdotally, police officers tell us that the same group of people is responsible for the majority of crimes they see. They know these people, they can identify them readily and they deal with them repeatedly.

We also consistently heard concerns with youth crime in our communities. The most recent information from Statistics Canada shows that:

- Youth crime rates increased across Canada in 2006 and Alberta was no exception. The rate of youth accused of crimes (including those who are charged and those who are dealt with by alternative means) increased by two per cent in 2006. The rates for youth property crime decreased by nine per cent while the rate of youths involved in violent crimes increased by six per cent.
- Across Canada, the rate of youths accused of homicide was the highest it has been since 1961. Manitoba had the highest rates of youths accused of homicide followed by Alberta.

Another serious concern is the increasing prevalence of gangs. While the actual number of people involved with gangs is unknown, the Task Force certainly heard from both police and from community members about the growing presence of gangs, including Aboriginal gangs. The 2007 Report on Organized and Serious Crime notes that 54 “criminal groups” (gangs) have been identified in Alberta. These gangs are a direct source of many crimes and a serious threat to safety in our communities. Some gangs are directly linked to provincial, national and international criminal organizations.

The Task Force heard about young people being recruited into gangs, about the fact that young people don’t understand how difficult it is to escape alive from the gang once they become involved and the danger gangs present to communities and to themselves. Unfortunately, gang life has been romanticized. All too frequently, the life of individuals connected with gangs is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. Even if gang members avoid death, beatings, severe injuries and jail time are common, along with treachery and manipulation among gang members.

How safe are Alberta's communities? continued

We also heard that gangs are primarily involved in drugs, and while efforts are being made to reduce the supply of drugs in the province, as long as the demand is high, drugs will be prevalent and gangs will be involved. In fact, whenever a person buys any type of illicit drug – from marijuana to cocaine or methamphetamines – they are directly supporting gang activity in the province.

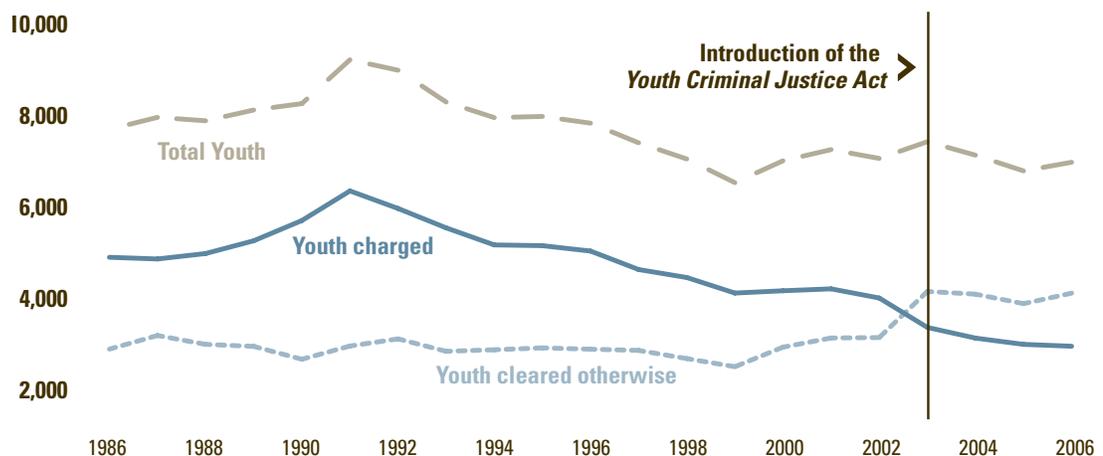
What happens when people get caught?

The Task Force repeatedly heard concerns about the lack of meaningful consequences for crimes and about sentences that appear to be nothing more than a “slap on the wrist.”

The story on sentencing is a mixed one. For some crimes, sentences have increased, while for others, sentences are shorter than in the past. For example, in Alberta, the average sentence for people convicted of homicide (2003-04) increased by nearly 100 per cent in the past 10 years, from just over five years to just under 10 years. There also have been significant increases in the length of sentences for sexual offences (up 34 per cent) and drug trafficking (up almost 27 per cent) as well as impaired driving.

On the other hand, since 1994-95, Youth crime rate, Canada 1986 to 2006

Rate per 100,000 population



Source: Statistics Canada, Crime Statistics 2006



sentences have gone down in Alberta for:

- Sexual assaults (down almost 13 per cent)
- Common assaults (down almost 35 per cent)
- Theft (down almost 56 per cent)
- Fraud (down almost 33 per cent)
- Mischief (down almost 30 per cent)
- Drug possession (down almost 57 per cent)

The reasons for changes in sentencing are complex and involve a combination of changes in legislation, judicial decisions, alternative sentencing approaches and early resolution of cases to make the criminal justice system more efficient. The courts determine the sentence in each individual criminal case based on a number of factors. The courts rely on representations of the lawyers before them, sentencing precedents, facts specific to individual cases, and in some instances, experts such as psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers, to determine the appropriate sentence for each offender.

Task Force members also heard concerns about the need for meaningful consequences for young offenders. Since the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* was introduced by the federal government, the proportion of youth formally charged by police has dropped from 56 per cent in 2002 to 42 per cent in 2006. This reflects a deliberate policy to divert young offenders into alternative measures rather than into the criminal justice system.

What do Albertans think about crime and safety?

The following provides highlights of what the Task Force heard through consultations, written submissions and an online survey. A more complete summary is available at www.safecommunities.gov.ab.ca.

What are the key issues?

Two words: *alcohol and drugs*

Repeatedly and consistently, the Task Force heard that substance abuse of all kinds is at the heart of most crimes. People get into fights because of alcohol and drugs. They steal because of alcohol and drugs. They're more likely to abuse their family members when alcohol and drugs are involved.

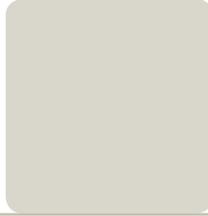
Issues related to drugs and alcohol cut across all communities – large and small, prosperous and poor. Alcohol and drugs have a particularly devastating impact on Aboriginal individuals, families and communities. They involve gangs and organized crime. They are a serious issue in resource-based communities where a “work hard – play hard” culture dominates and the use of cocaine has become socially acceptable.

People also talked about escalating violence in our society. We see it in fights that increasingly involve weapons, especially knives and guns. We see it in domestic abuse and family violence, bullying and violence in schools, gangs and the escalating violence involved. We see it in the media where people – including children – are routinely and regularly exposed to images of violence. And we see it in young people who have been senselessly murdered as a result of bad decisions by others or because they are simply in the wrong place at the wrong time.

“If there were one solution that would bring about immediate crime reduction and safer communities it would be an all out attack on substance abuse.”

Roderick W. Koski,
submission from
Wellspring Family
Resource and Crisis
Centre, Whitecourt





The Task Force also heard concerns about:

- The lack of enforcement of Alberta's *Gaming and Liquor Act* and regulations related to the accessibility, sales and service of alcohol
- Driving offences from speeding and accidents to impaired driving and aggressive driving
- Graffiti and vandalism
- Gambling
- Elder abuse

The Task Force also heard consistent concerns about the criminal justice system.

- Many people talked about the lack of meaningful consequences and the fact that sentences are not a deterrent to crime.
- People said that justice system processes take too long. The gap between the crime and the consequences imposed by the courts is too long for the outcome to have a meaningful impact on either offenders or victims.
- From victims and their families, we heard concerns not only with sentencing but also with the challenges of accessing support and understanding what's happening with court processes.
- From police and enforcement agencies, we heard frustration not only about delays in court processes but also about the increasing administrative burden on police. We also heard about the need for the courts to deal more appropriately with repeat offenders.
- People also called for more "visible" police – police who are on the street, checking local shops and getting to know community members.
- The decision to move justices of the peace out of local communities was criticized in many locations.

Many of these issues were reflected in responses to the Task Force's online survey. The four top crimes identified by survey respondents included drug-related offences, mischief, youth crime, and breaking and entering. More than 60 percent of respondents said that victims are not treated fairly by the criminal justice system and half of the respondents said the criminal justice system does not address Aboriginal justice issues in an appropriate way. Online survey respondents also called for changes to the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, getting tougher on crime so offenders serve their full sentences and more education about the criminal justice system and how it works.

What do Albertans think about crime and safety?

What factors affect crime?

Generally, the comments we heard can be grouped into the following six categories.

- **The “dark side” of the boom**

Alberta’s tremendous economic prosperity has a dark side that puts more stress on families and communities. We heard about the impact of poverty and the growing gap between rich and poor. We heard concerns about increasing homelessness due to the lack of affordable housing. And we heard that access to a lot of disposable income was also a source of crime, especially crimes involving drugs and alcohol.

- **Changing communities**

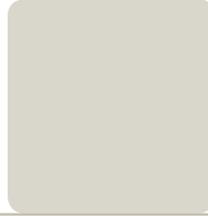
With a growing and changing population, Alberta’s communities aren’t necessarily the close knit places people remember from the past. While we heard about many communities taking impressive and comprehensive action to reduce crime and improve safety, we also heard about the lack of community engagement, about people feeling disconnected from their communities, neighbours not knowing one another and people not looking out for each other. This was especially the case in resource-based communities where a significant number of people (especially young men) come to work on a shift or seasonal basis while their families are elsewhere. We heard growing concerns about the shortage of volunteers and the challenge of getting people involved. And we heard about the unique challenges of engaging and involving immigrants and people new to Alberta and Canada.

“In anticipating potential trouble spots, the sheer volume of people taking up residence in municipal and rural locations is a consideration. The problems associated with harmful lifestyle choices facilitated by increased incomes may predominate law enforcement attention.”

2007 Report on Organized and Serious Crime, Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta, July 2007

“It’s not that this community is unwilling to deal with issues. It’s the high turnover of people that makes planning ahead more than two years difficult.”

High Level participant



- **Families under stress**

Time and again, the Task Force heard that the roots of many issues can be traced back to families: Families under stress with both parents working and children left to fend for themselves. Family members separated from their extended families. Lack of affordable and accessible day care. Challenges faced by single parents. Lack of positive parenting skills and the teaching of strong values. In many cases, parents don't know where to turn when they face a crisis or need help.

- **Children and youth**

A common thread through all our discussions was the need to focus on children before there are definite signs of trouble. We heard about problems with the criminal justice system and especially about the lack of treatment options for youth with addictions and/or mental health problems. In several cases, especially in Aboriginal communities, we heard about the growing impact of gangs and their influence on young people who see them as a source of identity and belonging. We also heard that some communities lack the programs and facilities to engage and involve young people in productive and positive activities. Respondents to the online survey stressed the importance of teaching values, enhancing parenting programs, providing more opportunities for youth and focusing on education as the most effective form of prevention.

- **Addictions and mental health**

Mental health issues frequently go hand in hand with addictions. Too often, mental health issues are not adequately addressed in communities. There are shortages of treatment options, counselling and community support services across the province. People with mental illnesses, addictions, or both, often slip through the cracks and end up in a criminal justice system which is ill-equipped to help them. We also heard about the impact of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and the lack of capacity for addressing the behavioural and learning issues it causes.

“People aren’t getting involved – they are afraid to step up and be counted for what they have to say.”

Calgary participant

“It’s not how rich or poor you are but the values instilled in you and the family environment you come from – the investment you make in your kids is what they are going to turn out to be.”

St. Paul participant

“Be a role model and be there for your kids. That’s number one.”

Hobbema participant

“Kids without vision and focus stoop to vandalism and crime.”

St. Paul participant

What do Albertans think about crime and safety? continued

- **Aboriginal communities**

While the challenges faced in Aboriginal communities are similar to those of other communities across the province, especially substance and alcohol abuse, the severity of those issues and their impact on Aboriginal people is extreme. The Task Force heard serious concerns about violence and the growing impact of gangs. We heard about the continuing impact of residential schools on individuals, families and communities. We heard about the lack of capacity and services to address many of the challenges on reserves. We also heard about racism and the lack of understanding among communities. In the face of these serious issues, we also heard voices of hope – from young people involved in the Cadets program at Hobbema, from elders tackling serious problems in their communities and from Aboriginal women who are actively involved in making positive changes in their families and their communities.

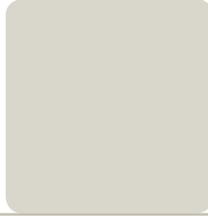
When asked similar questions about factors that influence crime in their communities, online survey respondents ranked family breakdown as the leading societal influence on crime followed by poverty, growth in the population and a hot economy. Individual factors that influence crime included availability of drugs and alcohol, poor parenting, drug and substance abuse, mental illness, lack of education or low literacy, bullying, gang membership and the availability of firearms.

What things are working well?

The list is long and the common thread is that the best and most effective solutions are developed and implemented in communities – when community members come together, take responsibility, work in partnership and receive the necessary support from governments, businesses, industry, families and individual community members.

“... it seems apparent that Aboriginal criminals have been courted by other criminal organizations ostensibly to facilitate the movement of illegal drugs into First Nation reserves. This kind of manipulation is sadly unfortunate as it victimizes whole communities struggling to improve the dignity of their people. Moreover, the creation of competition among Aboriginal gangs undermines the preservation of the unique heritage of these indigenous people.”

2007 Report on Organized and Serious Crime, Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta, July 2007



From a province-wide perspective, we heard that specialized courts (e.g. for domestic violence) are working well as long as there is access to treatment for offenders. The *Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act* (PChAD) has been effective in apprehending children and getting them directly involved in treatment, although many suggest that the time for treatment isn't long enough. Aboriginal participants and others said that alternative justice approaches such as sentencing circles are effective because it means people have to face their own community members and take responsibility for their actions. We also heard support for school resource officers, mentorship programs, Neighbourhood Watch and Block Watch programs, Citizens on Patrol (COP), Rural Crime Watch, early education, involvement of youth directly in programs for other youth, Boys and Girls Clubs and programs like Crime Stoppers.

Close to 40 per cent of online survey participants said that their communities were already working to reduce crime and over 70 per cent said that their community has the capacity to reduce crime. However, only 21 per cent said that crime prevention programs in their community were effective in reducing crime.

What isn't working?

Again, the list is long but it focuses on the following key areas:

- **Not enough emphasis on prevention**

Too much of the emphasis is dealing with crime after it has happened and on quick fix, short term actions. Prevention activities take a back seat when people are scrambling to deal with an urgent problem. A number of submissions stressed the importance of addressing the "root causes" of crime including poverty, family breakdown and problems affecting children and youth. Over 82 per cent of online survey participants said that the focus of reducing crime should be on preventing crime before it occurs.

"We need to stay the course on prevention. While it is difficult to do and hard to measure, it is more important than band-aid solutions after the fact."

Edmonton participant



What do Albertans think about crime and safety? continued

“When a community self-mobilizes, that’s when a lot can change.”

Banff participant

“Government does not have an integrated approach to funding. We talk about collaborative approaches, but then we all have to go to Treasury Board individually to get funding. This old model is not supportive of working across ministries on important initiatives.”

Edmonton participant

“There needs to be more specific guidelines around FOIP [*Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*] so people know they are protected if they provide information under certain contexts.”

Wainwright participant

- **The need for more community capacity**

People identified the need for more treatment beds to address mental illness and addictions, long-term sustainable funding for effective community-based programs, transitional and affordable housing, services for victims of family violence, professional staff, enforcement, treatment and access to services in rural communities. We also heard that smaller communities face significant challenges in funding the police services they need. From respondents to the online survey we heard that barriers to reducing crime in communities include the lack of involvement by community members, lack of financial resources, lack of appropriate programs for children and youth, lack of resources to support parents, lack of alcohol and drug abuse treatment programs and lack of mental health services.

- **Removing barriers**

Short-term, non-sustainable funding, countless pilot projects and the need to continually “chase” grant programs were all identified as barriers to effective community programs. We also heard repeated concerns about barriers to sharing information among agencies and organizations.

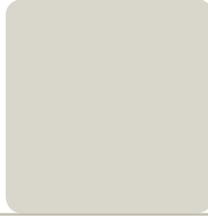
- **Integrating and serving the transient population**

This is a significant issue for many communities, especially resource-based communities like Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie and High Level. “Shadow” or transient populations⁶ are not adequately reflected in provincial funding formulas and this makes it very difficult for communities to respond to the needs of a growing population.

- **The criminal justice system**

As noted earlier, people expressed concerns about the lack of meaningful consequences, short sentences and the lengthy criminal justice process. People also said we expect too much from the police and the criminal justice system when individuals, families and communities should be taking more responsibility.

⁶ The term “shadow” population refers to the influx of people who move to communities for temporary work, particularly in the oil and gas industry. These people are not permanent residents and are not counted in municipal census numbers, but they live in or near communities on a short-term basis and often require services from those communities.



What needs to be done and who should do it?

Participants had a long list of suggestions about what needs to be done in their own communities and across the province. The specific ideas are included in the summary report and many of them are reflected in the Task Force's recommendations.

Most importantly, the Task Force heard a call for action. People aren't calling for grand plans or millions of dollars but they do want practical actions targeted at the challenges they see in their own communities. They also called for a more proactive approach – anticipating and looking at the causes of crime rather than only addressing the specific issue or problem of the day.

In terms of who is responsible for tackling these issues and taking action, the answer is "everybody." Clearly, people see the importance and effectiveness of action at the community level. But they also see the important role families can play. They called on the private sector to examine their own policies and practices and their impact on families and individual workers. They want the provincial government to provide sustainable funding, take a longer-term approach, remove obstacles and do a better job of coordinating the work of various departments. Police, judges and lawyers need to look at their own roles and responsibilities and take steps to streamline the criminal justice system and make it more efficient and effective.

In short, no one group has all the solutions nor can one group be charged with the sole responsibility to get it done. The issues are complex and require a network of people working together to address them.

"We don't need more laws. We need to better enforce the ones we have."

Edmonton participant

"There is no simple solution to complex social problems."

Calgary participant



What can we learn from others?

Task Force members examined a wealth of information regarding the factors that influence crime and research on the most effective ways of reducing and preventing crime. That includes evidence drawn from national and international studies, from longer term studies on the outcomes of programs targeted at reducing crime and from best practices and approaches for preventing crime.

The following provides some highlights of the key findings from the research.

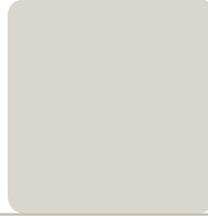
What factors influence crime?

Research suggests that the factors influencing crime are extensive and complex.⁷ They range from factors unique to an individual to broader societal issues and include:

- Age and gender – specifically, the number of people in high-crime age groups – young males between the ages of 15 and 25
- Unemployment and low income
- Educational levels including high school drop out rates
- Changes in families and parenting
- Household size
- Availability and use of alcohol and drugs
- Shifting social values
- Increased migration to cities
- A shift to communities where people don't know each other
- Legislative changes and changes in police practices

A number of additional risk factors have also been identified specifically for Aboriginal peoples including:

- Systemic discrimination
- Intergenerational cycle of violence
- Breakdown of healthy family life resulting from residential school experience
- Conflicts between the broader society's culture and their traditional values and culture
- Frequent moves combined with overcrowded and substandard housing



How does Alberta rate on the more common risk factors?

- Alberta's population is growing at an unprecedented rate and recent reports show that Alberta has the youngest population among the provinces with a median age of 36.⁸ Other studies peg Alberta's 18-24 aged population of males at 14.3 per cent, considerably higher than the Canadian average (12.7 per cent) and second only to Saskatchewan.⁹ These figures, plus the influx of young males to Alberta in search of work, suggest we have a significant number of people in the high-crime age group.
- Alberta has a fairly high rate of high school drop outs compared with other provinces. About a quarter of all students don't complete high school. The non-completion rates are even higher for Aboriginal students.
- The most recent crime statistics show that Alberta has the fourth highest rate of drug offences in Canada. Rates for cocaine offences have seen a dramatic increase and this is consistent with comments we heard, especially in resource-based communities.
- While it's hard to say whether Alberta's social values have shifted, we certainly heard about changing communities – about lack of community engagement and people not knowing their neighbours. We also see increased migration to the cities and a growing influx of people from other provinces and countries.

Alberta's Aboriginal populations are younger than the Alberta average and are growing at a faster pace than the rest of the population. On some of Alberta's reserves, the median age is as low as 15. The unemployment rate of Aboriginal people living off reserve was 10 per cent in 2004-05 compared with four per cent for the non-Aboriginal population. About 17 per cent of Aboriginals living off reserve live in overcrowded housing compared with six per cent of the non-Aboriginal population. Improvements have been made in the percentage of Aboriginal young people completing high school, but their completion rates continue to be lower than those for non-Aboriginal students and fewer of them go on to post-secondary education.

Studies also suggest that:

- 40 per cent of Aboriginal adults over 15 years were victimized by crime in the previous year compared to 28 per cent of non-Aboriginals
- 25 per cent of Aboriginal women experienced at least one incident of spousal violence in the previous year compared with seven per cent of non-Aboriginals

"Longitudinal studies ... confirm the conclusions from the consultation that being born into relative poverty, experiencing inconsistent and uncaring parenting, misusing alcohol and drugs are among the most important factors to pre-dispose a person to persistent offending."

Preventive Solutions for Crime in Alberta: From Evidence to Results, Institute for the Prevention of Crime, University of Ottawa, July 2007



8 Statistics Canada 2006 Census
9 CANSIM; IMDB Numbers

What can we learn from others? continued

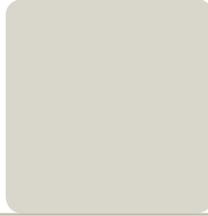
What does this information tell us about influencing crime in Alberta?

- Many of the factors that influence crime are broad societal issues that are difficult to change, especially in the short term.
- With a young population, we're more likely to have higher rates of crime than other provinces.
- Alberta's booming economy is a double-edged sword. More people are employed but people who are unemployed or who have lower incomes face a serious challenge and that can contribute to Alberta's crime rates. So can the high disposable incomes and the influx of people coming to work here and leaving their family ties behind.
- Many of the factors Albertans identified as influencing crime in their communities – especially alcohol and drugs, changing families and less cohesive communities – are consistent with what research tells us.
- Aboriginal people continue to be at high risk with lower educational attainment, lower incomes and employment, high rates of substance abuse and generations of violence and abuse – all factors that influence crime in our society.

Why do some people commit crime and others don't?

We know that some young people exposed to many of the factors that contribute to crime grow up to lead successful and productive, law-abiding lives while others choose a different path with frequent involvement in crime. Why does this happen?

Much has been written about what are called "risk and protective factors." Risk factors are personal characteristics or environmental conditions that research has shown can predict the onset, continuity or escalation of criminal behaviour. Risk factors include alcohol and drug abuse, delinquency, dropping out of school, teen pregnancy and violence. Protective factors are characteristics or conditions that buffer young people from risks and promote positive youth development. Protective factors include having positive attitudes and coping skills, a warm and supportive family, positive and healthy peers and living in low-crime neighbourhoods with access to support services.¹⁰



Several research studies have looked at risk and protective factors that are most commonly associated with youth crime, particularly violent crime. Those studies suggest that:

- The most powerful risk factors in childhood that increase the likelihood of being involved in violent crime at a later age are involvement in general offences (such as non-violent offences and property crimes) and substance abuse before the age of 12.
- Adolescents who are not involved in conventional social activities, are unpopular at school and have antisocial, delinquent peers are at high risk of becoming violent.
- Two problem behaviours are linked directly to violent behaviour – externalizing symptoms (e.g. hyperactivity, difficulty concentrating, impulsiveness, risk taking) and aggressive behaviour. About half of all serious violent offenders display these problems.
- Substance abuse is a central feature of a violent lifestyle. It doesn't necessarily predict violent behaviour (except for those who begin abusing substances before the age of 12) but the majority of violent offenders use alcohol and illicit drugs.
- Neither sexual abuse nor physical abuse is a significant predictor of youth violence when considered alone. While mental illness is only a small contributor to youth violence, it makes it difficult for young people to fit in.

“A successful, integrated and evidence based crime reduction policy will reduce crime by increasing the effort to tackle the concentrations of risk factors and life experiences that lead in different ways to persistent offending and repeat victimization.”

Dr. Irvin Waller
Institute for the
Prevention of Crime,
University of Ottawa

Why is this research important?

- Most people understand that the most successful approaches to reducing crime focus on prevention and start when children are young.
- If we have a better understanding of the factors that either put children at risk or protect them, we can identify children at risk, develop appropriate programs and target our resources.
- Any crime reduction and prevention strategy will be more effective if it is targeted directly at the risks and life experiences that lead people to become offenders, especially repeat offenders.

What can we learn from others? continued

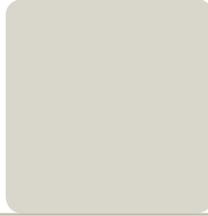
What approaches have been successful in preventing and reducing crime?

There is a wealth of research on approaches used in Canada and around the world to prevent and reduce crime and improve safety in communities.

A number of international organizations have identified key elements of effective crime prevention strategies. Both the United Nations' Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime (2002) and the World Health Organization's Report on Violence and Health (2004) identify the need for:

- **Leadership** - permanent and appropriately-funded centres responsible for crime prevention that have a voice equal to the other pillars of crime control (e.g. police, courts and corrections) and can gather the key players in developing and implementing action plans
- **Collaboration** - different sectors and partners working together to tackle the many risk factors involved including schools, social services, health, labour, police and criminal justice, community groups, the private sector, etc.
- **Targeted actions** - based on a problem-solving approach involving:
 - Analyzing local crime problems and community capacity to tackle risk factors
 - Setting clear priorities for actions that address risk factors
 - Implementing interventions using knowledge about proven ways to reduce crime
 - Evaluating the impact of the actions taken
- **Evidence and information** – enhancing the capacity to collect, coordinate and disseminate knowledge on the links, consequences, costs and effective prevention of crime through appropriate data systems and human capacity
- **Local initiatives** – engaging community members, raising awareness and participation and reducing local opportunities for crimes

The Institute for the Prevention of Crime at the University of Ottawa reviewed a number of different approaches that have been used to reduce crime. The Institute notes that broad scale societal improvements in employment rates or the percentage of people who go on to higher levels of education will decrease crime in addition to having more universal benefits for our society. While these are important issues to address, evidence suggests that because crime is predictable both in terms of who commits crime and who is victimized, strategies that are



targeted at the causes of crime are more likely to be cost effective and result in significant reductions in crime in the shorter term. In other words, addressing broad factors such as poverty and social conditions will improve the overall quality of life in Alberta and reduce crime over time, but the most effective approaches to prevent and reduce crime are those directed at particular offenders, types of crime, high-risk neighbourhoods and factors that contribute to crime.

Research indicates that strategies relying exclusively on deterrence and punishment are not effective in reducing persistent offending. Putting offenders in jail does separate offenders from communities for a while and so it reduces the crime these people could commit if they were not in jail, but the costs to taxpayers are high. Failure to address underlying causes also increases the likelihood of offenders continuing to be involved in criminal activity after they are released from jail. This isn't to suggest that a successful crime prevention strategy does not involve effective law enforcement and deterrence through meaningful consequences and jail sentences. Instead, it indicates that a multi-pronged approach is needed – one that focuses on targeted law enforcement and one that addresses the conditions and situations that lead to crime.

What works?

Scientific studies on effective approaches to reduce crime include:¹¹

- Providing enriched services to youth at risk of social problems by increasing their inclusion, involvement in positive social activities and job training.
- Helping small children to develop successfully in their early years. This can reduce child abuse by 70 per cent and cut the percentage of youth offending by 50 per cent.
- Increasing the training given to youth about non-violent ways of resolving conflict.
- Helping at-risk teenagers complete high school. Studies show this can reduce the number of youth offending by 50 per cent.
- Teaching youth skills and expanding their capacity to manage relationships. This has been shown to result in a 50 per cent reduction in bullying as well as a reduction in illicit drug use and violence (especially against women).
- Enhancing support (such as enriched home visiting) to disadvantaged mothers who are at risk of not providing consistent care for their young children.

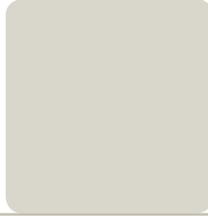
¹¹ *Preventive Solutions for Crime in Alberta: From Evidence to Results*, Institute for the Prevention of Crime, University of Ottawa, p. iv.

What can we learn from others? continued

How does Alberta compare?

Research undertaken by the Institute for the Prevention of Crime (University of Ottawa) suggests that “... much more could be done to fill the gaps between what was presented as effective crime prevention and the situation in Alberta today.” Specifically, the research notes that:

- Programs known to have prevented crime in other jurisdictions have not been implemented on a systematic basis throughout the province
- Limited strategic partnerships exist to focus a range of services on pro-actively solving the crime problem in an accountable way
- Municipalities have pioneered a comprehensive approach but have received only limited technical and financial support from other levels of government
- Limited training of practitioners means that not all strategies are evidence-based
- Local data such as surveys of crime victims, young persons and women are not generally available for use in planning or evaluation
- Although Alberta has partnered with the National Crime Prevention Centre, existing crime prevention initiatives are not coordinated through an integrated provincial strategy or action plan, and many projects are time-limited and lack sustained funding¹²



What does this research tell us?

- Leadership and collaboration along with a deliberate plan of action are essential to tackle crime effectively.
- Community-based, targeted strategies based on information and evidence have the best success in reducing and preventing crime.
- It's not enough to just focus on enforcement. The most effective approaches "weed and seed." That means they aggressively go after criminals and target communities most at risk, but they also invest in programs and services that build stronger individuals, families and communities.
- While there are many excellent programs and initiatives in place in Alberta, there hasn't been a consistent, province-wide strategy or action plan to prevent crime, support community-based initiatives or to apply the findings from research about the most effective approaches to prevent crime.

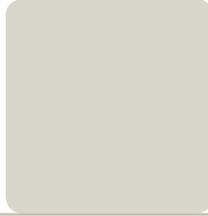
Weed and Seed

A successful approach sponsored by the US Department of Justice, Weed and Seed aims to prevent, control and reduce violent crime, drug abuse and gang activity in designated high-crime neighbourhoods. Over 250 Weed and Seed sites have been identified. The strategy involves a two-pronged approach: law enforcement agencies and prosecutors cooperate in "weeding out" violent criminals and drug abusers, and public agencies and community-based private organizations collaborate to "seed" much-needed human services including prevention, intervention, treatment and neighbourhood intervention programs. A community-oriented policing component bridges the weeding and seeding elements. For more information, see www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ccdo/ws/welcome.html.

What needs to be done?

Over the past six months, the Task Force has learned that:

- Crime is having a serious impact on our quality of life. It's hurting everyone: our families, our children, our elderly, our disadvantaged and vulnerable people. It causes Albertans to worry about safety in their homes, neighbourhoods and communities. Something needs to be done.
- Crime touches far too many people. We heard heartfelt stories from a young six year old worried about gangs and graffiti, from parents of youths killed by senseless violence, police dealing with escalating drug use and abuse, and Aboriginal communities struggling with the devastating impact of crime, poverty, alcohol and drug addictions and the proliferation of gangs. All of these stories are real and they need to be addressed.
- Drug and alcohol abuse takes a terrible toll and, directly or indirectly, it is at the heart of many of Alberta's crimes. The "work hard, play hard" culture that has developed in Alberta is a dangerous one. It's more than just the abuse of alcohol and drugs – it's the attitude that excessive drinking and the recreational use of drugs are acceptable in Alberta society. That attitude has to change. The negative impact spreads beyond the individuals involved to their families and to the entire community. And drugs are the basic bread and butter for gangs and organized crime in the province.
- The current criminal justice system is not working. People are working hard and some new approaches are producing good results. But we're not meeting Albertans' expectations. They expect offenders to be dealt with quickly and appropriately. They expect the most serious offenders to get punishment that fits the crime. They expect people – especially young people – with addictions to get treatment so they don't have to resort to crime to feed their habits. They expect their communities to be safe.
- The system is fractured – in fact, some would say it's not really a system at all. Police, the courts, social workers, mental health workers and community agencies are working independently when they should be sharing the same objectives. People are charged and convicted of crimes while their underlying problems of drugs and alcohol addictions and mental illnesses – problems that fuel their criminal activities – are given "band-aid" treatment at best.
- There's a serious problem with repeat offenders. Too many of the same people are committing crimes over and over again and the system is like a revolving door. Repeat offenders are caught, charged and released, only to commit the same crimes again.
- There isn't enough being done to prevent crime. Starting young and addressing the factors that put children and youth at risk is a proven strategy and one that will have the best results in the longer term.



- Preventing crime and improving safety isn't something government or the courts or the police can do alone, nor will it happen overnight. Albertans need to take responsibility at all levels. This is about individuals, families and communities stepping up and recognizing that many of the factors that contribute to crime are within their own hands.

Given this picture of Alberta today, what needs to be done?

The approach is twofold.

First, we need to be tough on people who commit crimes in Alberta, especially those who commit crimes over and over again. The costs of crime are high and the impact on victims is devastating. While the majority of our laws are set by the federal government, they need to hear a clear signal from Albertans that consequences for crimes should be swift, just and much more meaningful than what we see today. Within the aspects of the criminal justice system managed by Alberta, every effort should be made to tackle the most serious and prevalent crimes, enforce our laws and reverse the trends, especially around violent crimes.

Second, and just as important, we need to get tough on the factors we know contribute directly to crime. Pure common sense – backed up by consistent research – tells us that the only way to put a substantial dent in the \$5 billion in direct and indirect costs of crime in Alberta each year is to prevent more people from committing crimes in the first place. That means putting a top priority on children, youth, families and communities.

Our intention has never been to address every problem that contributes to crime in our communities. Frankly, that would be an impossible task. The issues are broad and complex and, in many cases, go to the very heart of families and communities and the changing face of Alberta. That means there are no quick or easy answers.

The Task Force also is cognizant of the fact that, in many ways, we're coming into a story that's already being written. Communities have recognized the serious impact of crime and are taking steps – many of them through concerted, deliberate and comprehensive plans – to prevent and reduce crime and improve safety in their communities. The provincial government has many positive programs in place and has taken steps to improve enforcement and provide support to a wide range of social agencies and organizations.

Our objective is not to reinvent the wheel or interfere with the many good initiatives already underway in Alberta. Instead, the Task Force focused on identifying key issues and factors that contribute to crime and safety, developing practical, targeted solutions that can be implemented in communities across the province and preparing a set of recommendations that tackle crime and safety at their roots.

What needs to be done? continued

For that reason, this report should be viewed not as an endpoint but as a catalyst for action – a voice for people who have been victims of crime or experienced the devastating impact of crime in their own families and communities, a recognition of the hard work and innovative approaches in communities determined to reduce crime and the beginning of a concentrated, focused strategy to reduce crime across the province.

Setting priorities

The Task Force identified five priority areas for action.

Drug and alcohol addictions

Taking action to treat addictions, enforce current laws and counter the Alberta’s “work hard, play hard” culture, especially in resource communities, will pay off in reduced crime and safer communities.

Laws and the courts

It’s time to reinforce existing laws, introduce new ones to tackle pressing issues and make sure the courts are dealing with offenders quickly and appropriately.

Families, children and youth

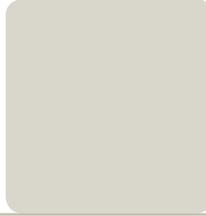
This is where we have the best chance of preventing crime before it happens – by supporting families, building positive skills in children and youth and getting them the support they need before they get in trouble with the law.

Policing

Police work hard in our communities to help keep us safe. They respond to crime and enforce the law. Their very presence, their involvement and commitment to communities is also fundamental to a proactive approach for preventing crime. Not only do we need more police to deal with a growing population, but we need to support their actions to improve reporting, target repeat offenders and address issues in high crime areas.

Community actions

The best solutions will come when communities and community agencies work together to tackle issues in their neighbourhoods and make community safety a priority.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Drug and alcohol addictions

Drug and alcohol addictions are the cause of the vast majority of crimes in Alberta. We know that young people who get involved with drugs and alcohol abuse at an early age are more likely to become involved in criminal activities. In resource-based communities, drugs are a serious problem contributing directly to crime and violence especially among young single men. Drugs are also the primary source of income for gangs and a growing demand for drugs, especially cocaine, is helping to fuel gang activity across the province. In addition to illegal drugs, we also heard concerns about the growing abuse of prescription drugs.

For those reasons, taking action on drug and alcohol addictions has to be the top priority.

Actions are underway across the province that require ongoing support and attention.

For example:

- The Premier's Task Force on Crystal Meth provided an extensive package of recommendations on ways of preventing crystal methamphetamine addiction, cracking down on those who produce and sell crystal meth and expanding treatment for people addicted to crystal meth. Many of those recommendations apply to other drugs in addition to crystal meth. Steps have been taken to follow up on some of the recommendations in the report, with a priority on prevention, early identification and treatment, and enforcement. The Task Force supports this approach and urges the provincial government to proceed with actions targeted at curtailing the use of all illicit drugs, including crystal meth.
- The province has established an Alberta Drug Strategy to provide a coordinated approach and a community-based response to alcohol and drug use issues. It is linked to Canada's National Drug Strategy and it focuses on five strategic directions: strengthening community partnerships, providing accurate information, ensuring effective prevention, providing access to quality treatment and ensuring strong law enforcement. A number of actions are already underway in each of those areas and should continue to be supported and expanded.
- A "work hard, play hard" culture has become common in many communities across the province. There is no simple way of countering this; however, the Task Force encourages communities and businesses to work together to address the more harmful aspects of this kind of lifestyle. Businesses in particular should take more responsibility for their employees and take steps to promote healthier lifestyles.

What needs to be done? continued

Recommended actions

1. Significantly increase the number of treatment beds for alcoholism, drug addiction and a dual diagnosis of both mental illness and drug addiction

The Task Force heard repeated concerns about the lack of sufficient beds for treating alcoholism, drug addictions and mental illnesses. Drug treatment courts are an effective approach for getting people into treatment but they won't work if offenders cannot receive immediate help. There's an urgent need for additional treatment beds all across the province.

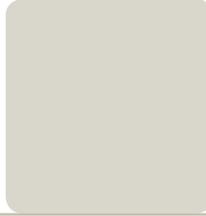
Additional treatment beds are needed for:

- Young people, adults, and Aboriginal people who are struggling with addictions
- Children and youth apprehended under the *Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act* (PChAD)
- People diverted through specialized courts
- Youth, adult and Aboriginal offenders

The Task Force did not undertake the necessary research to determine how many additional treatment beds are required across the province; however, based on earlier work done for the Premier's Task Force Report on Crystal Meth, we suggest that a minimum of 200 treatment beds are required across the province.

Because treatment for addictions is expensive, a good argument can be made that the proceeds from the sale of alcohol should help pay for these costs. One option is for the provincial government to dedicate a portion of the revenues from the sale of alcohol to offset the rising costs of providing treatment across the province. One per cent of the government's revenue from the sale of alcohol would amount to approximately \$5 to \$7 million a year.

Although the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC) provides many excellent programs and services for treating addictions, we also heard about the need for closer links between AADAC and mental health services provided through the Regional Health Authorities. AADAC's programs, funding criteria and level of resources should be reviewed to ensure that AADAC is fulfilling its mandate and addressing the growing need for addictions treatment across the province.



2. Ensure that at-risk children, youth and young adults have access to full-time, longer-term, intense treatment for addictions and mental illnesses. This would include the expansion of the mandatory length of time children apprehended under the *Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act* can be required to remain in treatment.

The Task Force consistently heard that there aren't enough full-time, secure and intense programs and facilities to provide treatment for young people with addictions and mental health problems. More beds are needed not only for youth who have become involved in drugs and criminal activities, but also for youth who are at risk of getting involved in a cycle leading to drugs, crime and recurrent mental illnesses. Rather than just treating the individual youth or the symptoms, these programs should take a holistic or "cocooning" approach, involving the entire family and wrapping services around young people to address their health and addictions issues. Treatment should also be expanded to include young adults up to the age of 22. This is consistent with the age limits included in the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act*.

The *Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act* has been successful in forcing young people into treatment. However, under the current legislation, young people can only be held for up to five days. After that, continuing treatment must be voluntary. The Task Force heard that five days simply isn't enough time to have the kind of lasting impact that's needed to treat an addiction. Therefore, we recommend the legislation be amended to allow young people to be held for an initial 10 days for treatment followed by up to three 21 day treatment stays. The additional time would be either voluntary or ordered by the courts and subject to judicial review.

3. Require tougher enforcement of the current laws and regulations under Alberta's *Gaming and Liquor Act*

Repeated concerns were expressed to the Task Force regarding violence and criminal behaviour associated with excessive drinking in bars and licensed premises, behaviour that often spills out onto the streets when bars close. Stricter enforcement of current laws is essential. Concerns about people being over-served, turning a blind eye to people who are intoxicated and remain in the bar, encouraging excessive drinking, serving drinks after the bar is supposed to be closed, and selling drugs inside of bars were all mentioned. More liquor and gaming inspectors are required along with expanded efforts to make sure the current regulations are followed by all bars and restaurants. Violations should be dealt with severely and immediately and should include suspension or cancellation of liquor licenses.

"We were all young once, sipping beers with our friends while someone's parents weren't home. But today it's not about beer or coolers or daddy's rum bottle. It's about cocaine."

Medicine Hat News
Editorial, July 27/07



What needs to be done? continued

The Task Force heard concerns that excessive drinking and the “work hard, play hard” atmosphere are taking a serious toll on individuals, families and communities. And yet current regulations allow bars to offer promotions such as low cost drinks or contests that encourage patrons to drink excessively. The Task Force also heard concerns about alcohol being delivered by taxis onto reserves where alcohol is prohibited. The provincial government should consider new regulations to address these problems and encourage more responsible drinking. First Nations Chiefs and Band Councils need to take a proactive approach to the devastating impact alcohol abuse has had on First Nations communities. They should consider passing bylaws to prevent taxis from bringing alcohol on reserves and work with the RCMP to provide the necessary enforcement.

4. Develop and implement a targeted social marketing campaign to counter excessive drinking and use of drugs

Targeted, consistent and effective marketing campaigns have been shown to have an impact on changing people’s behaviours. Campaigns encouraging people to quit smoking, not to drink and drive, and to wear seatbelts have resulted in substantial changes in people’s behaviour over time. This type of campaign could be targeted at a number of important messages:

- Making the link between drug use, including the so-called “soft drugs”, and the activities of gangs and organized crime. Every time someone buys or uses a drug, they’re contributing directly to gangs and organized crime. “Recreational” drug use funds organized crime and fosters violence, intimidation and criminal behaviour associated with gangs. This connection needs to be made.
- Countering the impression that marijuana is a harmless drug, that it’s safe and does no real harm, so it should be tolerated. In fact, marijuana today is a much more powerful drug than it was in the past. It contains much higher levels of THC¹³ and, in some cases, crystal meth and other drugs are added to marijuana. Marijuana can be addictive and act as a gateway to other drugs.
- Aggressively countering the view that it’s okay to “toke and drive.” In fact, driving while high on drugs (illicit or prescription) is just as dangerous as driving drunk.
- Providing more explicit warnings to pregnant mothers (including labels on alcohol) about the dangers of drinking alcohol and its potential to cause Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). FASD is incurable and has a lifelong impact. It’s also 100 per cent preventable. Companies that profit from the marketing and sale of alcohol should join this fight and take steps to prominently identify the dangers of alcohol to pregnant women in the marketing of all liquor products.



Government can play a lead role in coordinating and bringing a variety of players together to launch and sustain this type of campaign. Health Canada has a role to play. So does the private sector, particularly in helping to fund marketing initiatives and reinforcing messages with their own employees. Pooling resources from a number of different agencies could result in a strongly focused, province-wide, sustainable campaign.

Laws and the courts

Albertans typically respect laws and those who enforce them. But the Task Force heard serious concerns with some aspects of the criminal justice system. In some cases, people simply don't understand why sentences are what they are, why alternative approaches can work better than sending people to jail, and why it takes time to weigh evidence and ensure due process. Many think the balance has shifted to give more weight to protecting the accused than ensuring justice for victims. People expect the criminal justice system to address both punishment and prevention. When someone has made a mistake, something should be done about it, and the result should be a reasonable likelihood that the person won't commit the same mistake again.

The Task Force also heard some concerns about the impact of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. People said that too much focus has been placed on the rights of people accused of crimes and not enough on individual responsibilities and the impact of their actions on society. In general, people understood the importance of protecting rights and freedoms. However, they don't understand why that can result in cases being dismissed for seemingly technical or minor errors by the police, especially in serious cases where the accused person is clearly guilty.

The Task Force urges members of the criminal justice system from judges to defense lawyers and Crown prosecutors, educators and members of the legal community to address these issues and develop strategies for informing the public about how the system works and why, building bridges between judges and the communities where they work, responding to community members' legitimate concerns and restoring confidence in the system.

Steps also need to be taken to streamline the process and establish a stronger and more direct link between offenders and consequences. Steps can and should be taken to streamline the process and reduce the "churn" caused by repeat appearances, accused people failing to appear and cases being held over. In appropriate cases, alternative approaches such as Youth Justice Committees and Aboriginal sentencing circles should be used to direct offenders to the appropriate treatment and reduce the chances of them becoming repeat offenders. We also need to find much better ways of getting the various aspects of the system to work together to achieve better results, both in enforcing current laws and in actively preventing crime.

What needs to be done? continued

The Task Force urges the federal government to move ahead quickly on legislation aimed at protecting the public, reducing crime and creating safe communities. The federal government has several pieces of important legislation underway that would have a positive impact not only on key areas of the criminal code but also on preventing crime.¹⁴ In particular, the Task Force urges the federal government to move ahead quickly with legislation that would:

- Require jail time for any offender who uses firearms while committing a crime and require people accused of crimes involving firearms to justify why they should be released on bail
- Require those who commit a third serious injury offence to justify why they should not be designated as a dangerous offender and receive a life sentence
- Better address impaired and drug-impaired driving which causes death or serious bodily harm
- Raise the current age of consent to sexual activity from 14 years of age to 16

The Task Force also encourages the federal government to undertake a general review of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* with a view to reforming the legislation.

Recommended actions

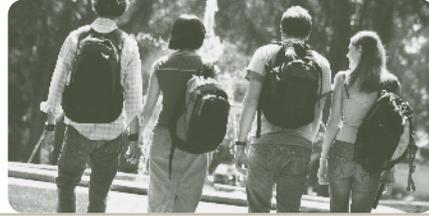
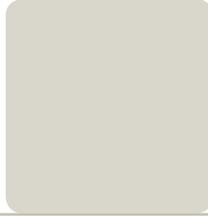
5. Expand access to specialized courts including domestic violence courts, drug treatment courts and mental health courts and increase available treatment to facilitate the coordinated approach used by these courts

The Task Force heard strong support for domestic violence courts and drug treatment courts. Instead of putting offenders in jail and doing nothing about the underlying problems, these specialized courts direct offenders to immediate treatment. If offenders fail to meet the terms of their treatment, the courts should have the authority to deal with the issues swiftly and directly. We recommend that similar courts be established for offenders with mental illnesses so they can get the treatment they need and reduce their likelihood of re-offending.

6. Adopt a Safe Neighbourhoods Act expanding the powers of municipalities to tackle crime and improve safety in their communities

Experience from other provinces suggests that, for some types of crime, giving municipalities the legislated power to introduce and enforce bylaws is an effective and often less complex way of tackling crime. For example, there are no provincial or federal laws that address consensual fights – the kind of fights that often take place among young men when bars are closing. Some municipalities have introduced bylaws with fines for fighting. This is a more direct, and likely more successful, approach than trying to introduce federal or provincial laws which then would involve compiling evidence followed by a lengthy and costly trial process. With a bylaw, the fines are set and the consequences are immediate. Similar legislation has

¹⁴ Specific amendments to the *Criminal Code* have been proposed in Bill C-10, Bill C-22, Bill C-23, Bill C-27, Bill C-32 and Bill C-35.



attempted to curb or address the presence of drug houses and marijuana grow operations in neighbourhoods. Police must have sufficient evidence before they can enter a suspected grow op. But with health and safety bylaws, more immediate action can be taken to shut down operations that are a risk to individual and community health and safety. These are just two examples of approaches that have been tried here in Alberta and in other provinces where more comprehensive safe communities and neighbourhoods legislation is in place.

Bill 212, the *Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act*, was introduced as a private members bill in the spring 2007 session of the Legislative Assembly. This bill should be reviewed, adjusted as necessary, and passed, if not in the fall 2007 session, then as a government bill in the spring of 2008.

7. Clarify the rules and remove barriers to sharing essential information, including information about suspected criminal offences

The Task Force repeatedly and consistently heard serious concerns about current legislation acting as a barrier to sharing information among police services, community agencies, schools and health regions in particular. Fear of liability for disclosing information has led to a “hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil” mindset. For example, instead of being able to work together and share essential information to address the needs of an at-risk youth, school staff think they cannot talk to the police, Children’s Services, social workers or mental health professionals and vice versa. Clearly there is a problem. Deliberate steps should be taken to either fix the legislation to make the requirements clear or fix the misperceptions about when and under what conditions information can and can’t be shared.

Another concern is with health providers disclosing information to police when they treat gunshot or stab wounds or in cases where domestic violence is suspected. These are serious issues. Failure to report these types of injuries can interfere with the ability of the police to investigate crimes and protect the safety of others. On the other hand, requiring health providers to report injuries may deter some people (particularly people who are victims of domestic abuse) from seeking treatment.

Recent changes to Alberta’s *Health Information Act* allow health care providers to disclose information to police when they believe an offence may have been committed and when the information could help avert or minimize “an imminent danger to the health and safety of any person.” In spite of this change to the legislation, the Task Force heard that Regional Health Authorities have stricter policies in place and doctors, in particular, are not in favour of disclosing this type of information about patients.

Nearly 1,200 people have been rerouted through the Calgary Diversion Program in the past five years. About 200 people each year are being taken out of the criminal courts and ushered into treatment. A recent audit shows the service saved the health and legal systems thousands of staff hours and led to better treatment for people with mental illnesses. Within a nine-month period, there was a 74 per cent drop in court appearances and a 60 per cent drop in complaints to police. Emergency room visits have dropped by 20 per cent, and the number of inpatient hospital days for this population dropped by 45 per cent.

Source: Calgary Herald article, August 22, 2007

What needs to be done? continued

Other provinces (e.g. Ontario and Saskatchewan) have introduced legislation requiring doctors and nurses to notify police when they treat gunshot or stab wounds. This type of legislation is certainly controversial with strong supporters on one side and strong opponents on the other. The provincial government should review the effectiveness of its current legislation and legislation in place in other provinces and consider whether and under what circumstances mandatory reporting may be appropriate.

Another issue relates to unusual patterns of power usage that may indicate the presence of an illegal drug grow operation. Aside from the person who owns or rents the property, the only other organization that would know about unusual power use is the power company. Power companies have concerns about disclosing this information without a warrant, even though there is little expectation that information about power use should be considered private information. Legislation requiring power companies to disclose this information to the police would give power companies the necessary authority and allow police to investigate a potential illegal drug operation. Therefore, the Task Force suggests that mandatory reporting of unusually large consumption of electricity should be considered.

8. Develop, enact and enforce legislation allowing the province to seize money and property gained through the proceeds of crime and use those resources to fund victim compensation, crime prevention and crime remediation programs

Crime impacts every facet of our communities. It costs individual victims and it costs communities and our province as a whole. Rather than having these costs borne entirely by Albertans, wherever possible, money should be recovered from people who engage in and profit from illegal activities. Those funds should be used to pay for victim compensation, crime prevention and crime remediation programs.

In Alberta, the *Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act (2001)* attempts to accomplish a similar objective. Parts 2 to 4 of the Act are designed to streamline the process through which victims can regain their property or obtain restitution without the time and the financial costs of a normal civil lawsuit. If an individual is convicted of fraud, a restitution hearing date is set immediately after conviction. During that hearing, any assets of the offender, including bank accounts, equipment, vehicles, real estate and businesses, may be seized and sold to compensate the victims for losses suffered as a result of the crime. At the hearing, a restitution or compensation order can be obtained. This is aimed at the direct recovery of compensation or restitution by the victim from the offender.

Part 1 of the Act has not yet been proclaimed. It would allow police to seize illegally obtained property to ensure that the property is not sold or otherwise disposed of while a legal action is ongoing. It would also expedite the return of the property to its rightful owner. In cases where no victim can be found or where the offence committed has no identifiable victim, such as in cases involving drug trafficking and gaming offences, proceeds and property may be



ordered to be paid to programs that support victims of the type of crime that has been committed or to the Alberta Victims of Crime Fund. This part of the Act is aimed at a form of civil forfeiture of the proceeds of crime.

Parts 2 – 4 of the Act are very important in assisting victims to get restitution or compensation. Resources should be provided to implement these parts of the Act. Wherever possible, losses suffered by victims should be covered by offenders and the process should be made as simple and effective as possible.

Steps should also be taken to enact and enforce legislation allowing the provincial government to seize money and property gained through illegal activities. Ontario¹⁵ and British Columbia¹⁶ both have legislation directed at the civil recovery of the proceeds of unlawful activities. The legislation allows the province to seize money and/or property if they can prove, on reasonable grounds, that it was gained through illegal activity. This means that offenders do not need to be convicted before money and property can be seized, as long as there are reasonable grounds to assume that it was gained through illegal activities.

The Task Force believes this type of legislation may be more effective than the current provisions in Part 1 of Alberta's *Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act* and therefore, we recommend that this approach be considered for Alberta. New stand-alone legislation that incorporates and adapts the best parts of the Ontario and British Columbia legislation may provide a better approach. We also urge the provincial government to be creative and forceful in the approach it takes and the legislation it enacts so there is a clear signal to criminals that government can and will take action.

British Columbia's *Civil Forfeiture Act* allows for wider use of the proceeds from illegally obtained property not only to compensate victims but also to fund crime prevention and remediation programs. The Task Force would like to see these options available in any legislation directed at the recovery and use of the proceeds of illegal activities to offset the cost of crime in our communities.

9. Require Crown prosecutors to be involved in bail applications before justices of the peace at the time of arrest and undertake a complete review of the current system to ensure it is meeting the needs of all stakeholders

The Task Force heard concerns from police that the current justice of the peace system has significant deficiencies. When there are bail applications before justices of the peace, frequently only the police and defense lawyers are involved while typically Crown prosecutors are not. This places a heavy onus on the police to prepare the case and puts the officers at a disadvantage when legal issues are raised. A process should be put in place to allow Crown prosecutors to be more directly involved in leading the bail application process from the point of arrest and appearance before a justice of the peace. This type of process is in place in other jurisdictions.

¹⁵ *The Civil Remedies Act* S.O. 2001, c.28, as amended.

¹⁶ *The Civil Forfeiture Act* S.B.C. 2005 c.29, as amended.

What needs to be done? continued

Additionally, the Task Force heard repeated concerns from police about problems with the centralization of justices of the peace services. This centralization has apparently resulted in a “disconnect” with communities. Local justices of the peace had more knowledge of the community and its issues. We also heard examples of difficulties with procedural fairness and understanding of the law. A review of the current justice of the peace system is underway and we recommend the review address not only the effectiveness of centralizing services but also the role, training and skills of justices of the peace. Police services must be consulted as part of the review. Front line officers who address bail applications and who can provide concrete examples of current problems should be directly consulted.

10. Streamline the criminal justice process

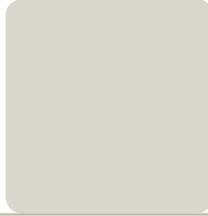
The current criminal justice process can take months, if not years, between the time a crime occurs, a person is apprehended and charged, and the end result of a verdict and a sentence. Throughout, it is not uncommon to see cases remanded to a later date, accused persons failing to appear at the court-appointed date, issues (e.g. *Charter* considerations) being argued during the process or lawyers requesting more time. All of this adds frustration for victims and witnesses, increases the costs of the system, delays and sometimes even precludes justice being served and undermines the public’s confidence in the process.

Steps should be taken on an immediate basis to identify where the bottlenecks and delays occur and how they could be better addressed. This is particularly important for cases involving young offenders. Approaches used in England and Wales (Speed up Youth Court processes) and the recommendations from the recent Nunn Commission of Inquiry in Nova Scotia¹⁷ should be considered.

Consideration should also be given to a “triage approach” where offenders are channelled into appropriate processes (including specialized courts and alternative justice programs) depending on the nature of their crime, whether they have been involved in criminal activities in the past or just made a one-time bad decision, and whether they have mental health or addiction problems. This would take pressure off the courts and allow the criminal justice system to focus more of its attention on repeat offenders.

Alberta Justice should lead the process and involve representatives of the entire criminal justice system, including judges, attorneys, Crown prosecutors and police. Consideration could be given to approaches tried in pilot projects in British Columbia where the courts, Crown attorneys, police, social agencies and mental health workers work together on minor offences. In some cases, an offender can be charged for an offence in the morning, have the consequences determined immediately, and he or she could be doing community service or some other appropriate sentence that same day.

17 *Spiraling Out of Control: Lessons Learned from a Boy in Trouble*. Report of the Nunn Commission. www.nunncommission.ca/home/index.cfm. The inquiry’s 34 recommendations included ensuring that youth appear in court within a week of committing a serious offence, reducing case-processing times, training police and justices of the peace, providing separate facilities for Youth Justice Court, appointing more youth court liaison officers, appointing additional Crown attorneys for youth matters, changing bail provisions, amending the definition of violent offender in the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, requiring youth to continue court-ordered behaviour and developing an interdepartmental strategy to coordinate programs and services for youth.



There is no doubt that access to affordable legal counsel is an important cornerstone of our criminal justice system and that representation by counsel can streamline the trial process. That being said, there are different ways of delivering services to accused individuals who do not have sufficient resources to pay for legal counsel. The Task Force recommends that Legal Aid Alberta review the feasibility of establishing a Legal Aid Defence Office, staffed by full-time salaried lawyers, caseworkers and assistants to do adult criminal matters. This approach has been successful in other jurisdictions and in Alberta in relation to young offenders. The Youth Criminal Defence Office (YCDO) began operating as a pilot project in 1993. The project was a remarkable success, ensuring high quality and committed representation for young offenders while also reducing delays in the system. Where the Youth Criminal Defence Office could not act for a young offender due to a potential conflict of interest, Legal Aid Alberta appointed private counsel. The YCDO staff counsel work together with social and youth workers to support the young offenders' rehabilitation. This approach should be reviewed to determine whether it would be effective for adults and help address delays in the criminal justice system.

11. Track and report on key indicators of the results of the criminal justice system in Alberta (e.g. use of diversion and its outcomes, delays in court proceedings, bail application results, length of sentences, breaches of court orders and the outcomes, guilty pleas to lesser charges, etc.)

Consistent with recommendation 10, steps should be taken to track leading indicators of the effectiveness of the criminal justice system in Alberta, particularly in areas where Albertans have serious concerns (e.g. delays in the process, sentences and bail). Trends in these key indicators should be tracked and the results should be provided to the Minister of Justice and used to identify areas where changes are needed to meet Albertans' expectations.

Legislation should be implemented requiring annual reports on a number of indicators including:

- The time it takes from when a charge has been laid to the eventual outcome or court decision
- The percentage of cases in which the maximum penalty is provided
- The number and percentage of cases where bail is provided and the number of bail violations
- The number of adjournments of criminal court cases and the reasons for the adjournments as well as the number of court date cancellations and the reasons for the cancellations
- The number of times charges or violations of bail or probation orders have been dropped
- The number of criminal proceedings in which the accused receives a credit (a reduced sentence) for time spent in custody before the conviction and the credit awarded

What needs to be done? continued

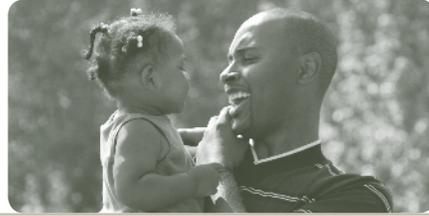
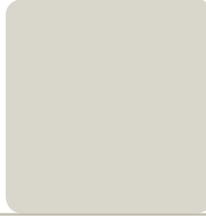
12. Ensure meaningful consequences for criminal activity through closer monitoring of offenders, expanding the use of effective approaches to custody and requiring strict compliance with the conditions of release

Albertans have serious concerns about bail and sentencing. They believe people accused of crimes get bail too easily, that sentences don't match the seriousness of the crime and that supervision of offenders once they've been released from jail is inadequate. These issues are primarily the responsibility of the courts and not directly within the mandate of the Task Force to address. Nonetheless, responsibility for bail supervision, probation, supervision of community sentence orders and early release for offenders serving sentences of less than two years in jail are the responsibility of the provincial government. The province also has responsibility for all issues related to young offenders requiring community supervision at all stages of the youth criminal justice process.

Concern has been expressed about lax conditions and supervision while offenders are serving sentences in the community. Some suggest that offenders view community supervision as a "slap on the wrist" and that breaches of conditions are not taken seriously or uniformly enforced. Offenders who breach the conditions of their sentence or bail demonstrate no respect for the criminal justice process or the courts. The Task Force urges the provincial government to consider alternate methods of ensuring respect for the law and compliance with conditions of release. This should include the use of electronic monitoring, zero tolerance for breaches and the strict prosecution of these offenders. In plea bargaining, consideration should be given to the importance of these types of offences (failures to appear, breaches of bail or sentencing conditions). Criminal records should also include information on these types of breaches so it can be considered if the offender is accused or convicted of another crime in the future.

In addition, given the significant dissatisfaction with our current criminal justice system, we strongly urge the federal government to:

- Target repeat offenders and establish a reverse onus on bail so that, after a certain number of offences, offenders would have to prove they are not a risk to re-offend in order to get bail
- Increase the mandatory minimum sentences for sexual assaults involving children and implement mandatory minimum sentences for drug trafficking and all offences that result in a person's death



- Send a clear signal to the judiciary that:
 - Sentences should be meaningful, appropriate and increase with each repeat offence
 - Sentences should consider the offender’s entire criminal past and criminal lifestyle not just the particular offence in question
 - There needs to be a consequence for each offence – consider more consecutive sentences rather than concurrent ones
 - Maximum sentences should be considered more frequently, especially for repeat offenders who have demonstrated no genuine interest in treatment or rehabilitation and a pattern of continuous criminal conduct
 - Failure to appear should be treated more seriously. It undermines the credibility of the criminal justice system, it adversely affects witnesses and victims and it adds time and costs to the process.

The Task Force also believes that more can be done with some offenders while they are serving their sentences. Although bush camps are not utilized as much as they were in the past, the Task Force sees considerable merit in making expanded use of camps such as the one currently in place at Shunda Creek. These programs help offenders break the cycle of offending while they are still serving their sentences.

With the shift to community-based sentences such as conditional sentence orders for adult offenders and deferred custody sentences, intensive rehabilitative custody and supervision orders, and custody and supervision orders for youth, these types of bush camps can provide a combination of life skills, productive work and treatment. They offer a unique and useful opportunity to make better use of the time spent and help set offenders on a more productive path back to the community. They also can provide an effective alternative to traditional jails for some offenders, particularly Aboriginal offenders.

In the past, inmates in provincial jails have worked on crews maintaining parks, assisting with municipal projects or fighting fires. That practice has been somewhat limited for a number of reasons. The Task Force believes that as long as inmates are not a risk to the community or a risk to escape, involving them in productive work that benefits the community is positive not only for the community but for the individual inmates and, therefore, should be encouraged.

What needs to be done? continued

Families, children and youth

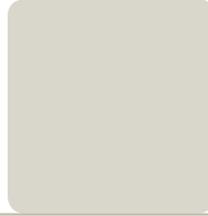
Research suggests that many of the factors that influence crime start with families. They begin when children are young and youth are exposed to drugs and alcohol and negative behaviours. Individuals and families have key roles to play both in their own families and in their communities.

Both the research and the consultations reinforced a consistent message. Families are at the heart of this issue and one of the best ways of preventing crime is to ensure that children and youth grow up in supportive, positive and caring families. Achieving this, however, is something that goes well beyond the work of this Task Force. But we believe families themselves need to take time and put their own families first.

In terms of what needs to be done to support families, the Task Force heard about many excellent initiatives underway in communities across the province and about initiatives by the provincial government. Many of these initiatives simply need to be reinforced, enhanced and supported on an ongoing basis.

Provincial initiatives such as Parent Link Centres should continue to receive support and expand their services, particularly for at-risk families. Provincial programs aimed at preventing family violence and bullying are also making good progress and need ongoing support. Workplaces can and should do a much better job of considering the impact of their policies and practices on employees and their families. The media also has a role to play in reinforcing positive images about families. Communities should consider expanding “family friendly” policies for the use of facilities and services. And the provincial government should continue to place a priority on families in all of its programs and services from schools and health care to children’s services, culture, sports, parks and recreation.

In addition, initiatives aimed at the impact of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) should continue. FASD has a significant impact on children, families and communities. Often, people with FASD find themselves in trouble with the law and entwined in a criminal justice system that is ill-equipped to deal with them. Programs aimed at providing assistance to individuals and families dealing with FASD and programs aimed at preventing FASD (which is 100 per cent preventable) should be encouraged and promoted.



Recommended actions

13. Provide mandatory, early and ongoing education for children and youth to build their skills and reduce the risks of them getting involved in gangs, drugs, violence or other crime

Given the importance of starting with children and youth, the Task Force recommends that early and consistent approaches be put in place to “repeatedly inoculate” them against the risk factors associated with becoming involved in criminal activities. Programs should start when children are young and be appropriate for their age and understanding. This should include expanding character education, addressing ethics and values, dealing with peer influences and emphasizing the consequences of getting involved with bullying, drugs and alcohol and other types of negative behaviours. Specific programs should be implemented in schools with high percentages of Aboriginal children to ensure that their culture, traditions and beliefs are reflected in the approaches that are taken.

Rather than making this an added responsibility for teachers, families and community members should be actively involved along with police officers, health providers and social workers. Specific steps should be taken to work with specialists in gang culture and investigation to develop targeted strategies to prevent young people from getting involved in gangs. We also consistently heard that the messages about drugs, alcohol, prostitution, gangs and criminal activities have the most impact on young people when they come – not from teachers or lecturers – but from someone who has “been there” – who knows first hand about the impact and the consequences. In communities where resources are limited, a “travelling team” of educators, police and especially young people who have seen and felt the direct impact of drugs, crime and violence, should be established to visit schools and work with children, youth and families.

Provincial funding should be provided to ensure that these programs are in place in schools across the province. Children are at risk in every community and they all need to receive the benefits of this type of education.

14. Ensure that schools have access to both a school resource officer and to adequate counselling services

The Task Force heard very positive comments about the value of school resource officers in building positive relationships between the police and students and in helping to address risk factors that can lead young people to get involved in crime. These comments came not only from community members but also from youth who the Task Force members met through the Youth Secretariat and from young offenders in correctional facilities. Unfortunately, not all schools have access to a school resource officer.

What needs to be done? continued

The Task Force also heard that there is limited access to counsellors in schools. Both school resource officers and well-trained counsellors can help address problems before they become more serious, especially at a time when young people are vulnerable to drugs and alcohol, peer pressure and other negative influences. Counsellors become a kind of “early warning system” that can identify at-risk children and youth and take action.

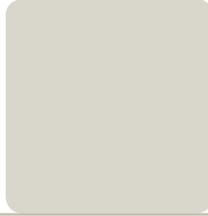
Teams of social workers and counsellors should be established and work together to meet the needs of students across a school division. They would not necessarily need to be on-site in every school on a full time basis; school boards should determine where the highest needs are and where the resources are needed the most. This is an important way of directly addressing risk factors that can lead to crime, providing a bridge between students, families and the police and making sure children, youth and families get the services they need, when they need them.

Costs for expanding access to school resource officers and counsellors should be shared by the provincial government and the education system. Because of their policing responsibilities, municipalities should share in the costs of providing school resource officers. In addition, the school resource officer program should be formalized with specific objectives identified. Opportunities to share best practices should be provided and, in some cases, sheriffs and other peace officers could be used to provide these services.

Schools are also in a good position to identify at-risk youth and to take targeted steps to address their issues by modifying school programs, addressing learning disabilities, introducing targeted programs for Aboriginal children and youth and taking proactive steps to keep young people in school. Schools, communities and the provincial government should work together to expand mentoring programs for at-risk children and youth.

15. Expand provincial support for programs aimed at preventing domestic violence and providing support for families that are victims of domestic violence

Research suggests that family violence remains a serious problem in Alberta. Children and youth raised in families where violence occurs are more likely to end up as offenders or victims. The provincial government has extensive work underway focused on preventing and addressing family violence and bullying. This work should continue to receive strong support from the provincial government and community organizations involved in tackling this very serious crime. Successful programs such as Homefront in Calgary and other approaches in place in communities across the province should receive provincial support to allow them to expand their programs and meet increasing needs. Specific programs should also be put in place (with provincial support) to address the needs of Aboriginal women and children living off reserve who are victims of domestic violence.



It is also essential to ensure that intensive treatment programs are available for offenders as part of the domestic violence court initiatives so abusers can receive the help they need to stop the cycle of abuse.

16. Implement targeted pilot projects to provide comprehensive community-based services to at-risk youth and their families

The Task Force consistently heard concerns about at-risk youth and families. Programs provided through Parent Link Centres, Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) and Child and Family Services Authorities are excellent resources but there can be a gap between those programs and the youth and families who need them the most. Pilot projects can help to bridge that gap and identify the most effective ways of making a connection with at-risk youth and families. Services should “wrap around” the families, providing a wide range of targeted programs and services to meet their needs.

17. Establish a Family Source within the provincial government to provide a central source for information, resources and community connections

Throughout its consultations, the Task Force repeatedly heard that when families face challenges or serious problems, they simply don’t know where to turn. We learned that there is a wealth of different programs and services provided either by the provincial government or by community-based agencies and organizations. However, many of these programs are largely unknown in the community and, as a result, when families are faced with a crisis – whether that involves access to treatment, incidents of domestic violence, children in trouble or the need for immediate housing – they struggle with where to get help, information and support.

There is considerable merit to providing a “one-stop” information source for programs and services available through the various departments of the provincial government including Health and Wellness, Education, Children’s Services, AADAC, Justice and the Solicitor General. This approach would also serve as a catalyst for providing better coordination of family-focused programs across provincial government departments.

At the same time, it’s even more important for families to be linked directly to services in the community where they live. That means taking steps to build awareness and linkages with community-based programs. The provincial government established the 211 phone line as a point of access and information about community programs. However, the Task Force found there is very little awareness of the 211 line. One of the functions of the proposed Family Source would be building awareness and expanding the effectiveness of the 211 line. Lessons can be learned from the way the province-wide Health Link service has been aggressively and continuously marketed to build awareness and increase the use of its services.

What needs to be done? continued

Policing

Alberta's police services play a vitally important role in preventing crime, deterring criminal activity, taking action when crime happens and keeping our communities safe.

Through our consultations, we heard about mounting pressures on police services and the challenge of meeting those pressures with limited resources. We heard concerns about the administrative burden and excessive paperwork that takes away from the use of police resources on the streets where they can make a real difference. We heard that, too often, police are disconnected from community agencies that can provide treatment and address the needs of the offender – not just deal with the specific offence involved. We heard police and community members' frustrations with the criminal justice system and the time it takes for cases to be resolved. And we learned about the potential to have a significant impact on reducing crime by introducing targeted strategies aimed at repeat and habitual offenders.

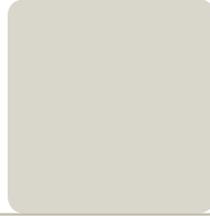
Recommended actions

18. Increase the number of police officers

Over the past three years, the provincial government increased its support for police services and the result is a three per cent increase in the number of police officers in Alberta. The last two provincial budgets have added 210 new RCMP officers to front line policing along with another 74 to tackle organized crime, drugs, gangs and child exploitation.

In spite of these increases, compared with other provinces, Alberta ranks eighth with 168 police officers per 100,000 people.¹⁸ Saskatchewan has the highest rate at 205 police officers per 100,000 people followed by Quebec (198), Manitoba (196), Ontario (188), British Columbia (179), Nova Scotia (178), and New Brunswick (172).

Given Alberta's rapidly growing population, the number of young, single males coming primarily to resource-based communities and the province's relatively high crime rates, a good case can be made for increasing police resources across the province. This would allow more police officers to be engaged in proactive, "visible" policing, not only to enforce the law after a crime happens but also to use their resources to prevent crime before it happens. We understand police services are facing serious challenges in attracting and retaining police officers, but this does not take away from the importance of adding more police officers to meet Alberta's needs.



The Task Force also believes steps should be taken to reduce the burden on police services by making expanded use of sheriffs for processing arrests, transferring prisoners and doing traffic enforcement. Security services such as those currently working for universities and other public sector organizations can also work in partnership with the police. In terms of the administrative burden, introducing standard templates for case reports may be helpful along with expanding the use of civilian support staff for administrative functions not requiring direct police involvement.

It should be noted that hiring more police officers could result in more charges being laid against offenders. The potential impact on the courts and all aspects of the criminal justice system will have to be considered, including the need to find the most efficient ways of managing within existing facilities and possibly increasing the number of Crown prosecutors, judges, probation officers, social workers and other professionals to handle the increased volume of cases.

19. Take targeted action to address the serious problem of repeat offenders

As noted earlier in this report, 15 per cent of repeat offenders are responsible for more than half of all crimes in Alberta. Any effective crime reduction strategy has to include targeted actions aimed at tackling this problem. Repeat offenders consume a disproportionate amount of time and attention from police and the criminal justice system and divert resources away from other priorities. Working with police services, the province should identify and support pilot projects targeted specifically at repeat offenders. Pilot projects should identify the problem, identify the specific repeat offenders, profile their backgrounds and the types of crimes they commit, as well as develop and implement specific strategies to ensure effective enforcement, prosecution, sentencing, treatment and intense community supervision. Close cooperation between the police, the prosecution service and other key partners in the criminal justice system and community agencies would be required. The Task Force is not in a position to identify either the number or location of pilot projects but we urge the provincial government to consider including Hobbema as one of the pilot projects specifically targeted at the presence and growing impact of gangs.

What needs to be done? continued

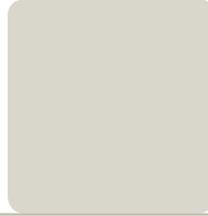
20. Identify and map high crime areas and support pilot projects targeted at improving safety in those “hot spots”

Research indicates that one of the best ways of reducing and preventing crime is to specifically track offences and identify “hot spots” with the highest concentration of crime and disorderly conduct (e.g. aggressive panhandling, disorderly conduct or areas with a high concentration of homeless people). This mapping and analysis approach allows police and justice partners, communities, government and social agencies to concentrate their limited resources on areas where they can have the biggest impact in reducing crime and disorderly conduct. Support may be needed to ensure that all police services have the technical and human resources and the necessary training to track province-wide information on the location of crimes, repeat offenders and crime density. Standardized reporting formats should be put in place so that information on crime is consistent and comparable across the province and can be reported on an annual basis. Information on activities that could contribute to or lead to crime should also be included. Researchers at Alberta’s universities and post-secondary institutions could support this work by developing, compiling and mapping the information on an ongoing basis. This crime mapping information should be tracked continually and made available to the public.

Following up on the “weed and seed” approach discussed earlier in our report, crime mapping information should be used to identify priority areas across the province. Up to six pilot projects should be supported by the provincial government and local municipalities each year to assess the impact of different community strategies on improving safety. Pilot projects would involve police and prosecution along with a wide range of community agencies. The focus would be on “weeding out” offenders (detering offenders, apprehending criminals and bringing them before the courts) combined with “seeding” community services (designed to prevent crime, work with youth and families, provide access to treatment and improve neighbourhood facilities). Results of these pilot projects would be shared with other communities across the province.

21. Expand the use of multi-disciplinary teams to address crises in communities

In some communities, multi-disciplinary teams have been set up to respond to high risk situations and people in crisis. These teams address situations involving family violence (spousal violence intervention teams), children at risk (CARRT) and people suffering from mental illness (PACT). They use specially trained police, mental health and social workers, supported by their respective community agencies. The teams are effective in providing a comprehensive and immediate response aimed at and equipped to solve problems. The use of these types of teams should be reinforced and expanded across the province. More work also needs to be done to provide appropriate links to specialized courts (see recommendation #5) and follow up services once the crisis has been dealt with.



22. Take targeted action to increase the percentage of crimes that are reported

National reports suggest that as many as two-thirds of all crime in Alberta goes unreported. This problem is not unique to Alberta but it must be addressed. Offences range from minor thefts and property damage to serious offences like sexual assault where as many as 90 per cent go unreported. The reasons why people do not report crime are extensive but include factors such as an expectation that nothing will happen as a result, fear of repercussions from offenders, lack of confidence in the criminal justice system, unwillingness to go through the lengthy criminal process and trauma caused by the incident.

Whatever the reason, it's important to find ways to increase the percentage of crime that is reported so that appropriate action can be taken. Unreported crime has the same or possibly an even greater impact on feelings of personal and community safety as reported crime. And unreported crime can add to a sense that personal responsibility and accountability don't matter.

Strategies for encouraging more people to report crimes should be developed in consultation with police and community agencies. Typically, these approaches would involve ways of engaging the community and building trust with the police services.

23. Establish an ongoing mechanism for municipalities to provide input into provincial policing priorities

The Task Force heard that many municipalities have police commissions or local RCMP advisory committees to provide input on local policing issues and priorities. However, there are concerns that municipalities, especially smaller ones with populations under 5,000 people, do not have an effective way of providing ongoing input into provincial policing priorities. Establishing an ongoing mechanism would connect grassroots issues with provincial policing priorities. It would provide an opportunity for municipalities, school boards, health regions and business groups to bring their issues and concerns forward. And it would help provide a stronger link between policing priorities and community concerns.

What needs to be done? continued

Community actions

The Task Force consistently heard that communities and community agencies are in the best position to address safety in their own communities, particularly when it comes to taking concerted action to address factors that lead to crime. We heard about many initiatives and community-wide strategies that are bringing agencies, individuals and community leaders together to tackle issues affecting their communities. The strategies range from coordinated attacks on drug use and domestic violence to proactive community planning – changing the way streets are laid out and where lighting is placed and making it more difficult for criminals to access homes and businesses – in order to reduce crime. Individuals can also play an important role by locking their cars and homes, ensuring adequate lighting and improving the visibility of their homes from the street. These are steps that can and are being taken by municipal leaders and planners and by individuals themselves.

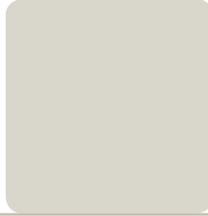
In spite of these important initiatives, the Task Force also heard that many communities are stretched to the limit – especially communities with a huge influx of people coming there to work. They simply don't have the resources or the capacity to meet the growing demands.

We also heard that Alberta's communities are changing as they grow and attract people from across Canada and around the world. Some communities with a high influx of people new to Alberta told us about the challenges they face in getting support to ease the transition. We understand that some support is available through both the federal and provincial governments. Nonetheless, the challenges in communities like Brooks (with a high percentage of new immigrants) are clear. More needs to be done to provide support and information not only for new Canadians and people who have just moved to Alberta but also for community members who need to embrace this growing diversity. More needs to be done to ensure better integration of a diverse mix of people in Alberta's communities.

Recommended actions

24. Encourage all municipalities to develop and implement a safe communities strategy

Several communities have established safe communities strategies while others are taking steps to improve safety and address specific issues. The Task Force was impressed not only by the commitment and energy of those involved but also by the concerted efforts and positive results. Issues of safety are so important that we believe every community should take steps to put safe communities strategies in place. These strategies should address the highest priority issues, bring community agencies together with the police and all aspects of the criminal justice system and focus on concrete actions to prevent crime and improve safety.



This would also provide municipalities with an opportunity to address the issue of homelessness and affordable housing. According to the Report of the Alberta Affordable Housing Task Force, Alberta’s housing shortage is a “crisis,” the housing shortage is “severe” and the timeline is “urgent and immediate.” Increasingly, Alberta’s homeless population includes the working poor, temporary and new workers and seniors. This is in addition to homeless people who may be suffering from mental illness, substance abuse and addictions, or a dual diagnosis (mental illness plus addictions) and those who need transitional housing. Without adequate housing, Albertans are more likely to encounter or engage in crime or to become victims of crime. For this reason, the Task Force also urges the provincial government to work with municipalities to tackle this issue and expand the supply of transitional and affordable housing.

25. Expand access to mental health services and treatment

The Task Force heard serious concerns with the overall lack of access to mental health services and treatment in communities all across the province. This is a particularly serious concern in fast-growing communities where there is limited or no access to services from psychiatrists, psychologists or other mental health professionals. Housing and support services for people with mental illnesses are also significant problems, particularly in Calgary and Edmonton where homelessness is a serious issue that is often tied to mental illness and crime. Unless these personal health problems are addressed, individuals will continue to suffer and the justice system will be bogged down dealing with the impact of issues that should be dealt with in the health system.

26. Provide three-year provincial funding for community-based social agencies with proven outcomes

One of the clear messages from our consultation process was frustration with the uncertainty caused by the lack of longer-term, sustainable funding for programs with a demonstrated track record. Current processes require agencies to re-apply every year and to “chase” new grant programs. The continuing cycle of applications is an undue drain on the resources of not-for-profit agencies, repeatedly diverting resources and time to the application process and away from the heart of the work these agencies do. In addition, uncertainty over funding prevents these agencies from committing to longer-term programs that might exceed the funding period.

Communities and the province depend on the services these organizations provide – without them, the costs to governments would be substantially higher than they are today and many of the services they provide would simply not be available. They are, in many ways, our front line. To achieve a balance between streamlining assistance and ensuring accountability, annual reports on results achieved by community agencies should be required. In addition to three-year funding for agencies that have demonstrated positive results, the provincial government should consider streamlining current processes (perhaps through a single application form that provides basic information to a number of grant programs or government departments).

What needs to be done? continued

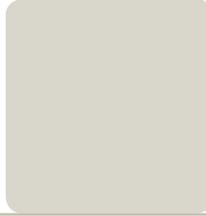
27. Adapt provincial funding formulas and criteria to reflect the impact and needs of “shadow” populations

Communities like Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, High Level and many others across the province face a substantial influx of people who come there for work, sometimes on a seasonal basis and sometimes for extended periods of time. Communities are expected to provide essential services such as health care, social programs, child care and municipal services to these “shadow” populations. In some cases, transient workers (especially young single men) actually add to the rates of violence, crime and drugs in communities. But the Task Force heard that the number of transient people is not adequately reflected in provincial funding formulas. The Task Force believes funding formulas and criteria for provincial funding should reflect the reality of these shadow populations and the fact that they place a significant burden on communities. We recognize that this may not be an easy task, given the uncertainty around the numbers of people served, but it is essential to provide communities with the base of resources they need to serve their full population.

Communities and companies employing transient workers also must step up their efforts to reach out to shadow populations and find ways of engaging them in positive ways. There is a significant corporate responsibility when employers bring large numbers of people into a community for work – and the Task Force consistently heard that many employers are either not doing their part or are not doing enough to tackle this serious issue.

28. Expand the current tax deduction for charitable contributions to include time spent on volunteer activities

Just as communities and government depend on social agencies and services, community agencies depend on volunteers to provide many of the services that contribute directly to our quality of life. However, the Task Force heard about a growing challenge in attracting volunteers. “The same ten people” are counted on to do the bulk of the volunteer work and it’s putting increasing pressure on the people involved. In some cases, volunteer work is time-consuming, requires extensive training and is too much for people who are already leading very busy lives. The Task Force urges the government to look at the current requirements for charitable deductions and to develop an appropriate mechanism for recognizing time spent on volunteer activities in addition to financial contributions. Recognized charities would be able to issue tax receipts for a specified number of hours spent by volunteers. In addition, steps should be taken by schools, families and communities to encourage more young people to get involved in volunteer activities. The private sector should also be encouraged to promote and support volunteerism among their employees by providing time off for volunteering and recognition for the work of volunteers.



For Aboriginal people and communities

Five messages are important at the outset.

- While all communities experience some level of crime, the experience in Aboriginal communities is severe in comparison. Alcohol abuse and drugs, family violence, sexual abuse, assaults, vandalism and gangs are taking a serious and devastating toll on individuals, families and communities. It's an issue that cries out for action.
- There are signs of hope. Aboriginal families are raising their children with traditional values and positive expectations. More Aboriginal youth are staying in school and going on to post-secondary education and training. Elders are playing an important role in reinforcing Aboriginal traditions and strengthening their communities. And community members, especially Aboriginal women, are taking the lead in addressing serious issues of family violence, drugs and alcohol abuse in their communities.
- In spite of the seriousness of the situation, not enough leaders of First Nations are stepping up and making this a priority. Blame is frequently pointed elsewhere while families and community members continue to suffer. If we're going to see real action and dramatic improvements, the leaders of First Nations communities have to step up, get serious about tackling abuse, violence and crime, and stop their young people from getting involved with drugs and gangs. These issues can only be addressed in communities, by families and community members, and with strong leadership from Band Councils. This work needs to be initiated from inside these communities and supported by others outside the community.
- Jurisdictional issues involving the provincial and federal government and First Nation Bands are an ongoing barrier. While crime and disorder on First Nation reserves are the responsibility of the Band and the federal government, we know that these issues and their impact are felt beyond reserves and are everyone's problem. The provincial government does not provide services on reserves unless it is invited to do so and funding is provided by the federal government or the local First Nation. In many cases, that means services on reserves do not compare with those provided in other communities across the province. It's time First Nations Bands and the federal and provincial governments found better ways of respecting the intent of laws set decades ago – not letting those laws stand in the way of much-needed and valuable services for First Nations people.
- There are no stone walls dividing our First Nations communities from their surrounding neighbours. Problems faced on the reserve inevitably bleed out into surrounding communities. The lines between reserves and surrounding communities are, in many ways, artificial boundaries. Perhaps more importantly, the people in these communities are suffering. Just as every Albertan should care about their fellow Albertan in High Level or Brooks, we should care about Aboriginal members in communities that face addictions, violence, crime and the impact of gangs on an epic level.

What needs to be done? continued

Because of the jurisdictional issues, the ability of the Task Force to make recommendations affecting reserves is very limited. However, we strongly encourage both the First Nations leaders and the federal government to:

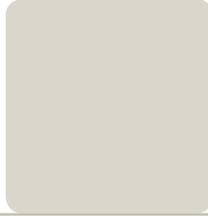
- Expand access to family violence shelters, treatment centres and programs on reserve. The Task Force heard serious concerns about the impact of family violence and the fact that, to escape abuse and get treatment, the victims of family violence have to leave the reserve. We heard of attempts to establish shelters on reserves being held up because of an inability to get insurance. Steps should be taken to address the issues, provide more treatment and shelters on reserve, develop culturally appropriate tools and training for people who work with victims of family violence and develop programs targeted specifically at children who have been exposed to family violence.
- Expand the number of positive role models and mentors for First Nations youth on reserves. Too many young people are leaving school, battling alcohol abuse and drugs and getting involved in gangs. From what the Task Force heard from Aboriginal youth, far too many of them have seen their family members and friends die from violence or suicide. The best hope for the future is to find ways of keeping more First Nations youth in school, giving them positive options and activities and providing positive role models and mentors to help them walk through the challenges they face.
- Establish Aboriginal justice committees on reserves to reduce the number of Aboriginal people who become involved with the justice system. These committees should address a wide range of issues including increasing understanding of the criminal justice process, addressing alternative sentencing approaches, identifying successful strategies and building better bridges between the criminal justice system and Aboriginal peoples.

The provincial government is responsible for meeting the needs of Aboriginal people who live in towns and cities across the province. Many of the recommendations included in this report, especially those directed towards at-risk children and youth, should be specifically targeted at young Aboriginal children in order to give them a better chance at success.

The Task Force also makes the following specific recommendations:

29. Partner with Alberta's First Nations and the federal government to jointly develop pilot projects designed to build safer communities, reduce crime and address the needs of at-risk community members

A province like Alberta, with its resources, caring attitude and support for communities, should not and cannot turn a blind eye to the serious problems on reserves – regardless of who is legally responsible.



One solution is to establish pilot projects designed to build community capacity and reduce crime. The specific projects or approaches should be determined by Aboriginal communities, but involve a coordinated and collaborative approach to crime prevention. Initiatives could involve addictions, mental health or family violence treatment, recreational opportunities, mentoring programs or ways to enhance educational attainment. Successful approaches should be shared with other communities.

These pilot projects could build on the success of the “Alberta Response Model” – a model that utilizes a range of community partners (all levels of government, the voluntary sector, businesses and non-profit organizations) to mobilize and support children and their families. The guiding principle behind the Alberta Response Model is that all children, whether on reserve or off, should have access to the same level of care. Similarly, all Albertans should have access to resources that will make their communities safer.

As a first step, representatives from Alberta Justice and International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations should meet with First Nations leaders and representatives from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and the Department of Justice Canada to address their collective commitment to resolving the crime and safety issues impacting Aboriginal people throughout the province.

30. Fully implement the recommendations of Alberta’s Commission on Learning regarding Aboriginal education and expand initiatives aimed at improving high school completion rates for Aboriginal students

This is about options and opportunities. The Task Force heard how many Aboriginal youth feel that they face a bleak future, on and off reserve, with few options and even fewer opportunities. This hopelessness translates into a heightened vulnerability to drugs and alcohol abuse, suicide, violence and involvement in gangs. While this is by no means a simple problem, the Task Force believes that education provides a significant part of the solution. An education can open up many more options and opportunities for Aboriginal youth.

Alberta’s Commission on Learning made extensive recommendations on Aboriginal education and the Task Force has heard mixed reports on how extensively those recommendations have been implemented. We urge the government to move forward with those recommendations and to take steps to increase the number of Aboriginal youth who finish high school and go on to post-secondary education or training.

Next steps

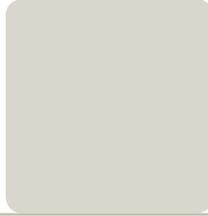
The Task Force recommendations provide a comprehensive starting point for preventing crime and improving safety in communities all across the province. They reflect what we've heard and learned through an intensive six-month process. They are not intended to cover all the potential actions that could be taken but to provide a decisive and focused starting point. What Alberta really needs in order to tackle crime and make our communities safer places to live is a concerted, long-term plan of action and a centralized capacity to take action and follow through.

Therefore, the Task Force recommends that the following important next steps should be taken:

31. Establish a comprehensive, longer-term Alberta crime reduction and prevention strategy coordinated and supported by a dedicated responsibility centre within the provincial government

Criminal behaviour is a complex social problem for which there are no quick or easy answers. The Task Force learned that reducing and preventing crime can't be a one-shot effort – it has to be sustained over the longer term in order to produce significant results. This is supported by research on successful strategies from around the world that consistently points to the need for deliberate longer-term plans supported by permanent and appropriately funded centres responsible for crime prevention.

Work on developing and implementing a longer-term strategy should be led by Alberta Justice and involve provincial government departments, communities, the police and other partners in developing a concerted plan for tackling and preventing crime across the province. It would give focus to many of the initiatives already underway. It would help coordinate actions across the various provincial government departments and public sector organizations. It would track results and report publicly to Albertans. A dedicated responsibility centre would provide specialized support and ensure that plans are implemented and positive results are achieved.



The Task Force's report should serve as the starting point for a comprehensive three to five year crime reduction and prevention strategy. Additional actions to be considered as part of a province-wide strategy could include:

- Establishing province-wide priorities and coordinating actions across the province to target the most prevalent crimes
- Developing strategies for addressing serious issues that contribute to crime and safety, particularly homelessness and the impact it has on the safety of homeless people and the communities where they stay
- Establishing effective ways for communities and municipalities to share successful practices in tackling crime and improving safety
- Considering the viability and effectiveness of alternative approaches such as expanding the use of bylaw or provincial statute ticketing and fines to provide immediate consequences and avoid the need to involve the criminal justice system
- Considering alternative ways of providing restitution for victims
- Engaging the news media and the entertainment industry in discussions about ways to combat violence and violent images, especially for children and youth
- Developing strategies for addressing the growing problems of white collar crime, fraud and identity theft

The province-wide strategy should be backed up with ongoing research including conducting independent evaluations, compiling evidence and information and measuring the effectiveness of various initiatives. This type of research is essential to guide future priorities and to make the most effective use of resources. Targeted research would track information about victims, offenders and offences. It would design evaluations of programs and work with organizations in setting appropriate criteria for assessments. It would support the ongoing work on crime reduction and ensure accountability for resources committed to reducing crime in Alberta. Researchers at Alberta's universities and post-secondary institutions would be in an excellent position to support this essential work.

Concluding comments

As Task Force members, we greatly appreciated the opportunity to travel the province and speak with people directly about crime and its impact on their lives and their communities. We also appreciated very much the willingness of so many people to participate in our consultations, share their experiences and ideas and talk with us and with other community members about what needs to be done. Those discussions reinforced the importance of moving forward with clear and deliberate strategies and decisive actions to tackle crime and improve safety in our homes, our individual lives and our communities.

We were impressed with the commitment of people who are working hard in their day to day lives and in their volunteer time to help make their communities safer places to live. These people are a credit to our province and a key reason why the vast majority of people feel Alberta's communities are safe places to live.

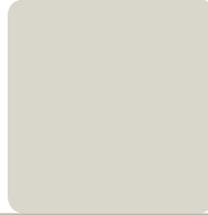
At the same time, we were alarmed, deeply saddened and disturbed by stories of families devastated by the impact of drugs, alcohol and crime. We are concerned that this "work hard, play hard" attitude is making drugs and violence much too common in Alberta communities. We share the serious concerns of Aboriginal and other communities about the impact of gangs. And we worry that, without concerted and deliberate action, Alberta's rates of serious and violent crime will continue to be high.

For those reasons, we urge the provincial government to move ahead with the recommendations in our report and to immediately put the necessary process in place to establish a province-wide crime reduction strategy.

We also urge Albertans not to wait for others to take action. As we noted at the outset of our report, preventing and reducing crime and improving safety in communities goes well beyond the responsibility of the provincial government. Therefore we call on people to get involved.

To our political leaders

This is not about political agendas or specific parties. **All** political leaders should work towards the common goal of crime reduction and safe communities. A better quality of life, safer communities and fewer victims of crime are goals all of us can share.



To our corporate leaders

Corporations are profiting considerably from Alberta's booming economy. The Task Force believes that they should shoulder some of the responsibility for the consequences of this boom. Corporations are in the unique position to provide assistance and benefits to the communities they work in. This is not to suggest that corporations are not already committed to their communities but more could be done. Whether that involves offering employees paid time off to volunteer their time and services to community not-for-profit agencies and charities, or providing better, broader programs to assist in the safe and responsible settlement of newcomers coming to this province to work, or helping communities manage the impact of "shadow populations": Some of the simplest initiatives could have substantial impact.

To individual Albertans

From the standpoint of the Task Force, this is where the impetus for real and long-term change must come. It is the people who can make the biggest difference. Each of us must take personal responsibility for our safety and the safety of the members of our community. Each of us must decide that we are willing to be part of the solution. We have lost our connections. We have lost our commitment. We must find them again. **We must get involved.** This means making the effort to meet and know our neighbours. It means reporting crime when we see it. It means taking steps to protect our own homes and property. It means supporting our not-for-profit community agencies that are being crippled by the steady decline in volunteers. And it means taking steps to counter the attitude towards drugs and alcohol that is putting far too many individual lives and families at risk. We understand the pressures. We understand the stresses that everyone is operating under. However, one person **can make a difference.** Hundreds of thousands **can effect great change.** Be a mentor. Coach a sports team. Work with at-risk youth in your community. Start or support your local neighbourhood patrol. Incorporate volunteerism as a family activity.

We are under no illusion that a report like this will eliminate all crime in our communities. Instead, we see this as an opportunity to make a positive difference in the lives of many Albertans and their families, to provide a catalyst for concerted and deliberate action to attack crime in our communities and, in the longer term, to make our communities safer places for Albertans today and in the years to come.

Appendix 1

Consultation dates and locations

April 23 – Wainwright
April 25 – Edson
April 27 – St. Paul
April 30 – Edmonton
May 1 – Hobbema
May 4 – Grande Prairie
May 7 – Lethbridge
May 8 – Brooks
May 9 – Medicine Hat
May 12 – Youth Secretariat
May 14 – Red Deer
May 15 – Fort McMurray
May 22 – High Level
May 23 – Banff
May 24 – Calgary
June 19 & 20 – Provincial
Symposium, Calgary

Submissions to the Task Force

Michelle Andrews, Grant
MacEwan College
R. Beard, personal submission
Allen Benson, CEO, Native
Counselling Services
Roy Bickell, personal submission
Suzanne Bucci-Mazerolle,
personal submission
Andrew R. Cameron,
personal submission
Howard Cann, personal submission
Harvey Cenaiko, Alberta Alcohol and
Drug Abuse Commission

Diane Conrad, PhD,
Assistant Professor University of Alberta
Pat Cowman, DataDot Canada
E. Keith Dewey, personal submission
Detective John Dooks, Calgary Police Service
Denis Ducharme, MLA
Bonnyville-Cold Lake
Rita Estwick, Retail Council of Canada
Karen Gariepy, Grande Prairie Community
Action on Crime Prevention
Steve Harrington, Security Analyst
R.K. Holliday, Safer Cities Concept
Garry Jobin, BladeRunners
Don Johnson, Alberta Association of
Municipal Districts and Counties
Roderick W. Koski, Wellspring Family
Resource & Crises Centre
Perry Lightning, personal submission
Nancy Mannix, Norlien Foundation
John McGowan, Alberta Urban
Municipalities Association
Corrine Miller, personal submission
Helen Mulkay, personal submission
Mark Nicoll, Office for Disability Issues
Bradley Odsen, The John
Howard Society of Alberta
Les Rempel, Mayor of High River
Beverly Smith, Recent Research
on Caregiving
Jen Sputek, personal submission
Laurie Szymanski, Hope Foundation
of Alberta
Cheryl Tardif, personal submission
Floyd Visser, The Sharp Foundation
Don Weisbeck, Mayor of Brooks
D.M. Winchester, personal submission
Anonymous, personal submission

Appendix 2

Risk and protective factors

Risk factors can be grouped into five categories:

- Individual factors – including early involvement in minor crimes, substance abuse, being male, aggression, restlessness, impulsiveness and difficulty concentrating and low IQ
- Family factors – including antisocial parents, family management problems, poor parent-child relationships, broken homes or separation from parents, low supervision, physical abuse or neglect
- Peer group factors – including gang affiliation and the influence of peers who engage in risky behaviour and think it's okay
- School factors – including a low commitment to school, poor attitude and performance in school, early academic failure, engaging in and thinking antisocial behaviour is okay
- Community factors – including neighbourhood disorganization, low socioeconomic status, availability of drugs and guns, high rates of mobility and low neighbourhood attachment

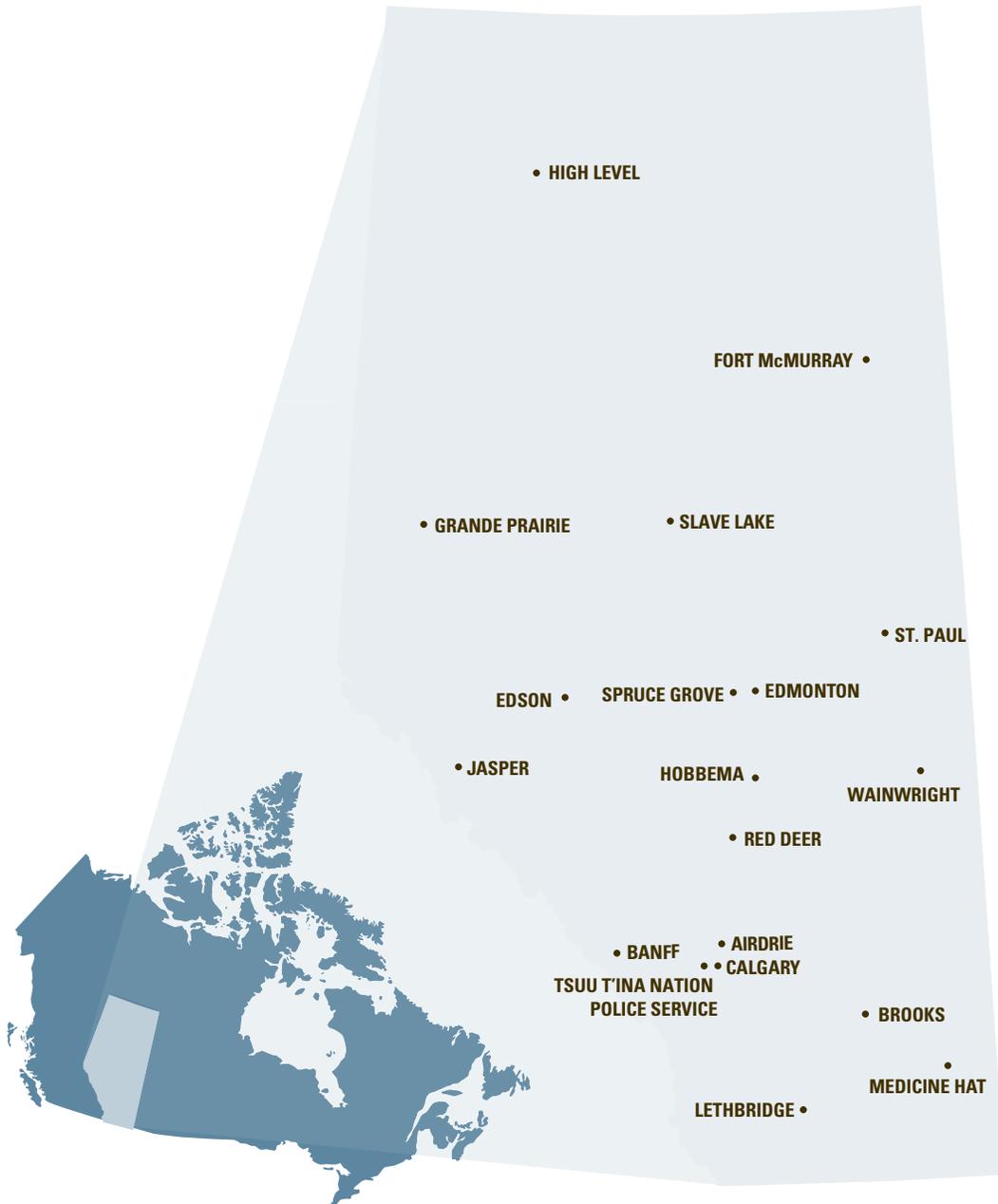
On the other hand, protective factors include:

- Individual factors – including an intolerant attitude towards deviance; cognitive, social and emotional competence; social, problem-solving and coping skills
- Family factors – including warm, supportive relationships and bonding with parents or other adults, good family communication, opportunity and recognition for pro-social involvement, parents' positive evaluation of peers and parental monitoring
- Peer group factors – including interacting with individuals and social groups who have healthy beliefs and consistent standards for behaviour
- School factors – including a high commitment and positive attitude toward school
- Community factors – including living in a positive neighbourhood with low neighbourhood crime, access to support services and attachment to the community

Other research takes the approach of identifying various “assets” children and young people need to acquire in their early lives in order to become healthy, positive and productive adults. These assets range from supportive families, good role models and positive communities to an individual child's commitment to learning, staying involved in school and having a positive identity. Additional information on these assets is available from the Search Institute at www.search-institute.org/assets/fort.html.

Appendix 3

Police Reported Crime Statistics in Alberta



		Total Criminal Code*	Total Crimes of Violence	Total Drugs	Homicide	
		Rate per 1,000 population	Rate per 1,000 population	Rate per 1,000 population	Actual Incidents	Rate per 1,000 population
CANADA	Total	75.2	9.5	3.0	605	0.02
ALBERTA	Total	95.2	11.0	2.6	96	0.03
AIRDRIE	Municipal	87.4	9.2	1.7	0	0.00
BANFF	Municipal	156.6	19.0	11.2	0	0.00
BROOKS	Municipal	172.7	24.8	6.4	1	0.07
CALGARY	Municipal	66.4	7.7	1.9	25	0.03
EDMONTON	Municipal	110.5	9.2	1.5	35	0.05
EDSON	Municipal	186.8	17.5	4.7	0	0.00
FORT MCMURRAY	Municipal	166.6	18.2	6.5	2	0.04
GRANDE PRAIRIE	Municipal	187.0	17.0	5.4	1	0.02
HIGH LEVEL	Rural	329.8	45.4	7.0	1	0.12
HOBBEWA	Municipal and Rural	1,127.5	213.1	14.5	2	0.55
JASPER	Rural	176.8	22.5	23.3	0	0.00
LETHBRIDGE	Municipal	98.8	10.5	2.0	0	0.00
MEDICINE HAT	Municipal	73.1	8.1	2.6	3	0.05
RED DEER	Municipal	132.1	16.3	3.9	0	0.00
SLAVE LAKE	Municipal	247.2	46.2	6.3	0	0.00
SLAVE LAKE	Rural	2,261.6	441.9	87.2	0	0.00
SPRUCE GROVE	Municipal	145.1	14.3	4.2	1	0.05
ST. PAUL	Municipal	279.4	42.3	7.1	0	0.00
TSUUT'INA NATION POLICE SERVICE	Municipal	1,229.0	358.4	13.4	0	0.00
WAINWRIGHT	Municipal	92.8	12.9	2.4	0	0.00

Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR), Statistics Canada, 2006.
*Charges do not include traffic offences

