

Winter 2018

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Executive Directors Update



Not so long ago, many of us were getting ready for the holiday season that was fast approaching. I find it hard to believe that we are already into February of 2018. Wow how time moves so quickly when you are having fun.

Change is upon us once again. You will see in this newsletter that the Council is moving the office at the end of February. Many hours of work by our Executive Assistant Stephanie Haar with a leasing agent, looking at various locations has paid off. We are staying in the downtown area, actually moving about 6 blocks straight north of our current offices near MacEwan University. Watch our website for the date and time of our open house.

We are also welcoming a new staff member Sandra Ngo to ESPC in the position of Research Coordinator. Many of you will remember that last year John Kolkman, made a decision to step into the role of Research Associate to continue to do research and analysis and support the Research Coordinator as they became familiar within the role. Sandra brings with her knowledge and experience in the food security world and she has been working closely with the ethno-cultural community. Have a look at her bio for more details.

Even though we are knee deep packing moving boxes we have and continue to be releasing research about our community. In November we released our Alberta Child Poverty report as well as a Research Update and are currently getting the 2018 Tracking the Trends report ready for distribution.

Please stay tuned for much more as this year continues to unfold, once we are settled in our new "digs" and the dust from the movers has settled.

Susan Morrissey
Executive Director
Edmonton Social Planning Council

Feature Article: Manuel Escoto

INVESTING IN CANADIANS: THOUGHTS ON THE NATIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY

Manuel Escoto

The 2015 census data measuring poverty in Canada indicates that 4,790,180 of 34,465,690 Canadians live in poverty (Statistics Canada, 2018). Given that nearly 1 in 7 Canadians live in poverty, it should be of little surprise that 53 percent live in households with at least one child (Statistics Canada, 2018).

In the local context, 432,000 Albertans live in poverty, with 76 percent of these households having at least one child. In Edmonton CMA, 135,240 persons live in poverty with 74 percent of households having at least one child (Statistics Canada, 2018).

The idea that poverty and homelessness primarily affects the transient population is a myth. The picture of Canadians sleeping on the streets or those who are considered chronically homeless accounts for 25,000 – 35,000 throughout Canada (National Housing Strategy, 2017; Gaetz, 2017). In other words, the results of unaffordable housing and poverty affects our friends, neighbors, children, and impacts all our communities.

To meaningfully addressing poverty and housing affordability requires drastic federal, provincial, and territorial leadership and funding commitments.

In a twist of irony, it's obvious that poverty is expensive. While it's difficult to measure the full economic and social impact of poverty and homelessness, it has been estimated that the cost of poverty in Canada is approximately \$72 to \$85 billion per year (Laurie, 2008). In Alberta, Vibrant Communities Calgary (2015) estimates the provincial spends approximately \$7.1 to \$9.5 billion per year because of the over utilization of resources, programs, and services in areas of healthcare, justice, and others because of poverty.

Given these astronomical costs, it clear that federal, provincial, and territorial leadership is needed to address the structural causes of poverty and homelessness. In an age of increasingly confrontational politics and the continued push towards market oriented policies, its been argued that our public institutions are at risk.

Canadians proudly point to our public healthcare system, our social safety nets, and our education system as proof that they Canadian system is inherently fair and justice. And while we should applaud the systems we have in place, we must remain critical about these institutions, their effectiveness, and scrutinize the gaps in policy.

If the federal government is indeed serious about reducing poverty and homelessness, it must collaborate with its provincial and territorial counterparts to develop policies that are preventative. Historically, both federal and provincial housing and poverty reduction strategies slow coming, reactive in nature, and have failed to make meaningful long-term investments towards addressing

the structural causes and poverty and homelessness.

Where has this led us? In addition to the aforementioned poverty statistics, 1.7 million Canadians are in core housing need (CMHC, 2017), meaning these people live in housing that is neither adequate, suitable, and/or affordable. Additionally, 235,000 Canadians experienced homelessness with approximately 25,000 - 35,000 sleep on the streets per night (Gaetz, Dej, Richter, and Redman, 2016). This is unacceptable.

As noted by Homeless Hub (2018), "The causes of homelessness include individual and relational factors, broader population-based structural factors, and the failure of many public institutions to protect people from homelessness. This suggests that homelessness prevention must not only include interventions targeted at individuals, but broader structural reforms directed at addressing the drivers of homelessness."

Viewed through this framework, the National Housing Strategy's \$40 billion investment over 10 years, while long overdue, is welcomed because of its goals to "cut chronic homelessness in half, remove 530,000 families from housing need and invest in the construction of up to 100,000 new affordable homes." Just as important, the strategy will "create liveable communities where families thrive, children learn and grow, and their parents have the stability and opportunities they need to succeed" with a specific focus on vulnerable populations (National Housing Strategy, 2017). If the national strategy is going to be successful, it must take a structural and preventative approach.

Planned investments highlights:

- \$15.9 billion for a new National Housing Co-Investment Fund that will repair existing social housing AND build new affordable housing. However, \$11.2 billion will be through low interest loans, presumably to provincial/municipal housing corporations and it does raise questions as to whether these organizations will find these will utilize these loans and affordability.
- \$4 billion Canada Housing Benefit to meet local needs and fight the challenge of housing affordability. However, this is a "jointly funding" 50-50 investment with provinces and territories, meaning further discussions and negotiations must be held. Are P/T government eager or able to prioritize this initiative?
- \$4.3 billion for a new Canada Community Housing Initiative, aimed at the long-term viability of social housing, given housing operating agreements are set to expire. However, participating provinces and territories again need to cost-match this funding. Is the appetite or funding available?
- \$2.2 billion to reduce homelessness over 10 years. Questions remain about whether this a \$220 million yearly investment is enough to reduce homelessness. However, perhaps this is why the strategy aims at reducing homelessness by 50%, not its complete eradication.

- \$241 million for research, data, and demonstrations. As correctly identified in the strategy, “new, more, and better housing information is key to overcoming housing challenges.”
- \$500 million for a new Federal Community Housing Initiative, which function as new operating agreements
- \$200 million in surplus federal lands and buildings available to non-profits and other affordable housing providers, but is provided at a cost (undetermined at this point).
- \$4 million in a Veterans Emergency Fund, which offers financial support and assistance to veterans in crisis.
- \$300 million to help some 3,000 northern families find affordable homes.

It’s universally agreed upon that all Canadians deserve housing that is safe and affordable, as access to housing is significant factor in health, education, and employment (CMHC, 2017). Indeed, housing is a human right and the federal government should be commended for its leadership in making housing a federal government priority. That said, the strategy deserve criticism.

For starters, the \$4 billion Canada Housing Benefit will not be launched until 2020. The strategy notes that this benefit was designed “to meet local needs” as a “tool to fight the challenge of housing affordability” by delivering an average of \$2,500 per household to an estimate 300,000 (National Housing Strategy, 2017). In other words, this benefits, once implement will allow individuals and families to live in homes that meet their needs, rather than in social housing. However, the launch of this launch is ill timed given the housing crisis facing Canadians today. Moreover, a \$4 billion funding promise after the 2019 federal elections should also be questioned.

In principle, the strategy targets Canada’s most vulnerable, while adopting a “whole-of-government” approach which “aligns housing with other important goals like creating jobs, increasing access to healthcare and education, and preventing violence against women” (National Housing Strategy, 2017). However, the strategy lacks the much needed preventative approach aimed at targeting structural factors.

For example, the investments must be made in health promotion strategies, rather than a focus on increasing access to healthcare. In addition, the strategy does not address how it’s going to stop individuals on the brink of homelessness from falling through the cracks, or how individuals in social housing can take the next step into the rental or homeownership market.

Furthermore, the income threshold to be considered in core housing need remains 30%. This means only household in need will receive assistance, but is 30% of an individual’s income a feasible threshold, given the current

rental housing market? How many families and households will continue to fall through the gaps? Is the proposed \$2,500 subsidy sufficient?

In Edmonton CMA, for example, the 2017 average rent for a 1-bedroom rental was \$989, \$1,215 for a 2-bed room, and \$1,376 for a 3-bedroom rental (CMHA, 2017b).. At a cost of \$989 for a single individual, using the 30% threshold, a single earner would need to earn \$3,293 per month and \$39,520 per year after-tax to ensure their rental falls below the 30% threshold. For persons not in census families, the median after-tax income is \$34,180 and \$9,740 for low income persons not in census families (Statistics Canada, 2018).

In a scenarios where a couple family with 1 child rents a 2 bedroom, the household income needs to be \$4,045 per month/\$48,551 per year to be below the threshold. A couple family with 2 children renting a 3 bedroom apartment would need to earn \$4582 per month and \$54,984 per year (Statistics Canada, 2018). However, the median after-tax income for a low-income couple family with one child in Edmonton CMA is \$17,690 and \$23,450 for a couple family with 2 children (Statistics Canada, 2018). For low-income lone-parents, the median after-tax income for 1 child is \$13,020 and \$17, 650 for 2 children.

That’s to say, the impact of a \$200 monthly benefit - while surely welcomed by these families - should be questioned. As per released documents, it is also unclear how this benefit will interact with existing social assistant benefits and provincially administered rent supplements. To have an impact, these benefits must be in addition to existing social assistance, rather than the replacement of current subsidization.

In addition, the Wellesley Institute correctly pointed out that while 60,000 affordable units and 300,000 households receiving the new benefit is needed, future grow has not been accounted for. The Institute notes “Canada has 1.1 million renter households in Core Housing Need (2016), including 400,000 in severe need who pay at least half of income on rent. Canada will grow by about 1½ million households in the next decade (medium growth scenario), and this would normally include about 200,000 more low-income renters” (Suttor, 2017).

Another issues is the lack of specific targets, implementation strategies, outcomes, and evaluation methods in the strategy. With a \$40 billion investment, much of which relies on provincial co-investment, Canadians deserve to know how the goals are going to be met, who is accountable, and how progress is going to be measured.

Finally, the strategy notes its role in respecting “the Government of Canada’s commitment to a nation-to-nation, Inuit-to-Crown, government-to-government relationship with Indigenous peoples”, which is represented by current “co-develop distinctions-based housing strategies for First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nation partners” (National Housing Strategy, 2017) and invests \$300 million for 3,000 families.

However, there is an estimated \$8 billion infrastructure deficit on reserves (Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal People, 2015). The Ministry of Indian and Northern Affairs reported in its On-Reserve Housing Policy, Impact Assessment 1996 – 2000, and “decent housing is a prerequisite for healthy and productive communities. Inadequate housing effects one’s health, education, employment, and social well-being”. In other words, there is a clear need for Indigenous communities on reserves to have access to decent housing, not only to promote healthy outcomes, but because housing affects broader social and economic forces that impact overall well-being of communities.

Should Canada maintain its current pace of on reserve housing infrastructure deficit, the Assembly of First Nations has argued that by 2031, on reserve communities will be in need of an additional 130,000 housing units (Assembly of First Nations, 2013). This means that more Indigenous people will experience worse health outcomes, at a great social and economic cost. Suffice to say, the \$300 million investment seems wholly inadequate.

That said, the National Housing Strategy is a first step forward towards providing every Canadians an adequate, suitable, and affordable, but serious gaps, questions, and issues remain. By addressing housing affordability and homelessness, the government is taking a step towards addressing poverty in Canada, poor health outcomes, and reduce structural barriers. But now that the National Housing Strategy has been unveiled, the real work begins.

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Manuel Escoto

Manuel is a former Research Assistant with ESPC. He has also worked in policy and research at Legislative Assembly of Alberta, currently works for the Kidney Foundation in a communications and advocacy role, and is completing his Master in Public Health (Health Policy & Management) part-time at the University of Alberta. He spends his summer’s time travelling the world with his partner, and his spare time with his enormous family, including his two dogs - Zeyda & Calina.

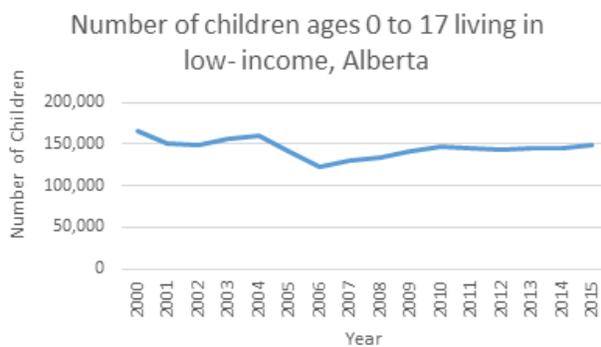
ESPC Updates

ALBERTA CHILD POVERTY REPORT

With our partners Public Interest Alberta and the Alberta College of Social Workers we recently completed and published *Keep Investing in Alberta's Children: The Government's Role in Ending Child and Family Poverty* Report.

Based on 2016 census data, 41,755 children in Alberta between the ages of 0 to 5 live in poverty, making up 13.5% of all children (Statistics Canada, 2017c). The Government of Alberta has taken significant action in reducing child and family poverty in the province, but more work needs to be done.

To read the full report please go to <http://bit.ly/2Aojt3t>



TRACKING THE TRENDS 2018

With all the focus on an aging population, did you know that the City of Edmonton is the youngest major urban centre in Canada, and the only one to have actually gotten younger in the past 10 years?

Many people are aware of Edmonton's increasing diversity. Tracking the Trends 2018 will tell you exactly how much more diverse with the latest data from the 2016 federal census on such topics as immigration, and ethnic and linguistic diversity.

Edmonton's economy has been hard hit by the fall in oil prices in the past few years. Using the latest data from a range of sources, Tracking the Trends 2018 will quantify the impacts on jobs, housing affordability, poverty and many other indicators of social well-being. All in an easy to understand format that combines charts, tables and trends analysis.

Accurate and timely data informs better decision-making. Tracking the Trends 2018 is your one stop source for the latest data and analysis on social and economic data that affects Edmontonians with low and modest incomes. Watch for Tracking the Trends 2018 when it is released in mid-March.

RESEARCH UPDATE NOVEMBER 2017

On at least a quarterly basis, the ESPC publishes a research updates that contains reviews of recently published research updates that focus on issues affecting those with low and modest incomes. The reviews are written by volunteer writers who freely give of their time to write and submit reviews. The most recent Research Update was published in November 2017 and featured contributions from three research reviewers. Publications reviewed included a Statistics Canada analytical report on Children in Low income Households using data from the 2016 Census, the Edmonton Community Mental Health Action Plan, and the Edmonton Suicide Prevention Strategy.

Here is a link to the latest Research Update: <http://www.edmontonsocialplanning.ca/index.php/resources/digital-resources/a-espc-documents/a06-newsletters/a06c-research-updates/1048-research-update-november-2017/file>

Edmonton Social Planning Council

EDMONTON COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH ACTION PLAN

REVIEWED BY DEBYANI SARKER

People suffering from mental illnesses often succumb to addition to relieve their pain, instead of seeking effective measures such as counselling services and resources. The action plan intends to work within this sphere in a community-based approach, increasing people's access to high-quality and comprehensive services to help them battle their deficiencies.

The three areas developed for evaluation of the plan include: **system integration, service delivery, and evidence foundation.** Each area will have a leadership team assigned, which will be supported by the Community Mental Health Steering Committee, the Project Lead, a Project Evaluation and Research Consultant and a Project Coordinator. Their mission is to work on enhancing protective factors for people such as: opportunities to pursue goals, knowledge of community resources, developing good coping skills, conflict resolution, focusing on healthy lifestyles and resiliency, access to support services, and economic security.

System integration involves actions with short term goals, such as the alignment of shared outcomes with appropriate government outcomes, monitoring results, improving the sharing of information across systems and agencies, providing enhanced navigational support to individuals and families who experience challenging transitions, promoting 211 as a navigational tool and increasing its access, and ensuring that complex client needs are met. Medium term goals include incentivizing sectoral collaboration with special grants, integrating community resources with the Edmonton Centralized Intake model, and increasing multi-disciplinary response teams for people in crisis.

Service delivery consists of the involvement of those with lived experience in the system as peer support, developing a common assessment questionnaire based on trauma-informed care using the best practice documents, developing a mental health and addiction engagement approach for individuals, their families, and seniors, and providing training to community allies. Medium term actions involve working with immigrants and Indigenous organizations to develop approaches that are more culturally and linguistically suitable for those groups.

Lastly, **evidence foundation** consists of developing an evidence-based business case to promote the action plan, partnering with research organizations to identify current and relevant evidence, widely sharing the plan to expand opportunities for uptake of actions, and using social and

traditional media to reach a wide audience including professionals and the public. Medium term actions include supporting opportunities for mental health professionals to understand measured changes in the broader community, and the synthesis and interpretation of data from shared measurements.

Overall, the plan seems to cover the important aspects of treating mental illnesses with optimally effective and affordable approaches, and across all individuals and communities. Besides increasing the quality of existing services, its implementation will ensure collaboration between those individuals and communities and the local and the provincial governments for maximized strategic growth, prevent harmful addiction and relapses, and will unify the Edmonton mental health community as a whole.

Publication Source:

Edmonton Community Mental Health Action Plan (2017). Retrieved from:

<http://www.edmontonsocialplanning.ca/index.php/resources/digital-resources/f-social-issues/602-health/1018-communitymental-health-action-plan/file>

Debyani Sarker is a student at the University of Alberta. Her skills and interests include editing, critical analysis and working with the statistical software SPSS.

Research Update - November 2017 5

ESPC Announcements and Upcoming Events



ESPC ON THE MOVE

After 10 years at our current location in the Commonwealth Building, ESPC will be moving. As of **March 1, 2018** we will be re-locating our offices to new and slightly bigger space at the Bassani Building located at

200-10544 106 ST NW EDMONTON, AB T5H 2X6

Public parking is available on the street or half a block south at MacEwan University. It is a 10 minute walk from the MacEwan LRT station.

Information to follow with the date of our open house.

VITAL TOPICS

We are pleased to be continuing to work in partnership with the Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) to research and produce the annual Vital Signs Report for Edmonton. This year, we are expanding our efforts to prepare 2 page fact sheets which will be included in the ECF quarterly magazine. Topics will be more focused to a few social indicators in greater detail.

Watch for the first one in the spring.

NEW STAFF: SANDRA NGO

We are pleased to announce that Sandra Ngo will be taking her position of Research Coordinator in March. Sandra is a graduate from the University of Alberta with a Master's Degree in Agricultural Economics. Prior to coming to ESPC, Sandra was the Community Resource Coordinator with the Multicultural Health Brokers and ENRICH. Sandra was instrumental in starting the Grocery Run which is a program that provides fresh fruits and vegetables to refugee families in crisis. She has been very active in the food security scene in Edmonton for a number of years. Please join us in welcoming Sandra to ESPC



UNITED WAY CAMPAIGN

Each year the staff, board members and volunteer participate in our United Way Campaign. This year we almost met our goal by 95%.

Many thanks to everyone who participated either through pledging and making cash donations, contributing baking to our annual Christmas Bake Sale, or stopping by to purchase baked goods.

AWARD OF MERIT

The Edmonton Social Planning Council (ESPC) is an organization committed to undertaking social research for the benefit of the entire community. We recognize many individuals and groups in our community also work tirelessly to advocate for programs in parallel to the ESPC vision of a just and inclusive community. The ESPC's annual Award of Merit recognizes an individual, or group, we believe has demonstrated a dedication and achievement in the pursuit of social policies for the benefit of Edmontonians, particularly those who are the most vulnerable.

If you are an ESPC member please watch for an email later in February with the deadline for nominations. Otherwise, please watch the website www.edmontonsocialplanning.ca for further details and information to nominate someone or group for the award given out at our Annual General Meeting in May.

VOLUNTEER NOW!

Are you concerned about social issues? Do you want to give back to the community? The Edmonton Social Planning Council is always looking for volunteers to help with its research and outreach endeavors. We will do our best to align your interests, availability and skills with the tasks we offer. In addition to writing for our Research Reviews and newsletters we occasionally call on our volunteers to act as note-takers, photographers and fund-raisers.

Visit our website at <https://www.edmontonsocialplanning.ca/index.php/about-us-2/volunteer-opportunities> to learn more about our volunteer opportunities and to sign up today.

If you'd like to join our ranks but don't see your perfect task, please write to our research associate to discuss your interest. He can be reached at johnk@edmonton-socialplanning.ca



Board Member Biography



DOUG MEGGISON

Doug moved back to Edmonton in 1998 after a 20-year sojourn which included living and working in Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Pennsylvania. Along the way, he earned a Bachelor of Arts (economics/biology) U of A (1986); Bachelor of Nursing, Dalhousie (1988) and Master of Arts Health Services Studies, Nuffield Institute for Health, Leeds University (1993). Although never having experienced deep poverty, Doug did lend support right away upon his return to Poverty In Action, a pressure group that had been incubated by the ESPC. Doug later joined the Board of ESPC in 2005. In 2012, he retired from Health Sciences Association of Alberta where he served 13 years as collective agreement negotiator, labour relations officer and policy analyst. Doug has continued his labour union associations over the years and currently serves as treasurer of the Alberta Federation of Union Retirees (AFUR). He says it is part of his commitment to social justice— reflected in past membership in about a dozen labour unions including USWA, AUPE, CEP, DSA, NSNU, NLNU, NAPE, 1199P SEIU, UNA, and IUOE. Doug's interests and activities include work in the local peace/antiwar movement, volunteering with the food bank, supporting a former refugee family from Syria, adult discourse in his book reading group, yoga practice twice a week at the Old Strathcona Community League, walking and travels with his wife, Marie Chidley. Doug leaves the ESPC Board in May 2018 and may very well return after the mandated one year break. Did he mention that it is his favourite organization in town?

5 Days of Homeless – Students supporting youth at risk



March 11 – 16, 2018 University of Alberta

Founded in 2005, University of Alberta School of Business Students identified youth homelessness as a growing issue, and wanted to create a stand-out campaign that could raise both funds and awareness for homeless and at-risk youth in Edmonton. 5 Days for the Homeless was created!

For the 13 years of its existence, 5 Days for the Homeless has supported the Youth Empowerment and Support Services (YESS). YESS is a dedicated charitable organization aimed at tackling issues surrounding youth who are facing difficult realities. YESS offers resources, guidance and countless services, including immediate emergency shelters, ongoing support programs and individual guidance, in Edmonton.

This year we have set an ambitious monetary goal of \$30,000. Our team goal is to raise awareness of homelessness across all corners of the University of Alberta campus to both students and staff.

The 5 Days for Homeless campaign is one in which students from the University of Alberta will spend five days living outside to raise funds and awareness for YESS. Our team will be sleeping outside at the University of Alberta, attending all of classes, having no access to personal electronic devices, and will be limited to donations in regards to food. To engage faculty and students, we will be hosting multiple events including a speaker series, pancake breakfast and barbeque.



ESPC Membership

The strength of our voice is dependent upon the support of people and organizations concerned about social issues—people like you. By getting involved with the Edmonton Social Planning Council, you add your voice to our message of positive social development and policy change.

Membership has its benefits:

To be a part of making Edmonton a community in which all people are full and valued participants.

To make it possible for us to distribute our material freely and widely.

To have a say in the direction of the organization.

To be eligible to serve on the board of directors.

To stay informed by receiving our newsletters, fact sheets and other publications.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP FEES

Small organizations (budget < \$1M)	\$50.00
Larger organizations (budget > \$1 M)	\$75.00
Individuals	\$25.00
Senior/Limited Income/Students	\$5.00
Associate (non-voting)	\$15.00

To become a member, visit www.edmontonsocialplanning.ca

Register and pay for your membership online (through **PayPal**) by clicking on the button in the category you wish to purchase (below), or;

Print out a membership form and mail it to our office, along with a cheque or money order made out to the Edmonton Social Planning Council **ESPC MEMBERSHIP FORM**

*Online payments are processed using **PayPal**. If you choose to pay online, you will be directed to the **PayPal** payment page after you fill out and submit your membership form. **PayPal** is a secure and trusted site for paying online using credit card or Interac email money transfer. **You will not be required to sign up for a PayPal account.**

Donations

The ESPC relies on the generosity of individual donors to support our ongoing research and public education. (Registered Charitable Tax #10728 31 94 RP 0001)

Financial contributions are fully tax deductible and you will receive a registered charitable tax receipt.

Your donation helps us do our work. It keeps our social research current and comprehensive. It allows us to take on bigger projects and make a greater impact in the community. It strengthens our voice—your voice, and the voices of those who lack the opportunity to speak for themselves.

To donate please go to:

<https://www.edmontonsocialplanning.ca/~edmont65/index.php/support-us>

About the Edmonton Social Planning Council

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- Susan Morrissey, Executive Director
- John Kolkman, Research Associate
- Sandra Ngo, Research Coordinator
- Stephanie Haar, Executive Assistant

The Edmonton Social Planning Council is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan social research organization, with registered charitable status. Our focus is social research, particularly in the areas of low income and poverty. ESPC is a source of knowledge and expertise on social issues within our community.

We are dedicated to encouraging the adoption of equitable social policy, supporting the work of other organizations who are striving to improve the lives of Edmontonians, and educating the public regarding the social issues that impact them on a daily basis.

Our Vision - A community in which all people are full and valued participants.

Our Mission - Through rigorous research, detailed analysis, and community engagement, we deepen community understanding of social planning issues, influence policy, and spark collaborative actions that lead to positive social change.

Connect with us on social media!
@edmontonspc



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