

RESEARCH UPDATE

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EndPovertyEdmonton: Year One Progress Report outlines the community's efforts to start addressing the thirty-five road maps to end poverty in Edmonton in a generation. The formation of the EPE Secretariat under the leadership of Andrea Burkhart in the first year is a key early development and was supported by guidance of the Stewardship Round Table, the Investment Collective, advice from Indigenous Circle, and from the contributions of people with lived experience of poverty.

To demonstrate net result of essential and radical change for those experiencing poverty, six Game Changer movements were discussed in-depth. The Game Changers outlined include eliminating racism, creating livable incomes, affordable housing, accessible & affordable transit, affordable & quality healthcare and access to mental health service and addiction supports.

The results so far have addressed the link between poverty and racism in our city. Edmontonians experience poverty when they lack or are denied economic, social and cultural resources to have a quality of life that sustains and facilitates full and meaningful participation in the community. Moreover, racism is the individual and systemic manifestation of the uneven distribution of power and prejudice related to culturally defined ideas of race (EndPovertyEdmonton report, pp. 52).

The progress of road map actions across the movement by Game Changers does address steps to understand the link between poverty and racism through the Edmonton Shift Lab. This example of implementing a social lab project to generate ideas to end racism has generated potential housing policy systems and community action prototypes that will help reduce racism as it contributes to poverty.

Addressing racism and discrimination continues to be identified as a critical piece of the puzzle on how EndPovertyEdmonton can reach the big goal of ending poverty in a generation in Edmonton. In Year One, EndPovertyEdmonton built in opportunities for people with lived experience to share their stories with both the public and policy makers. This work was evidenced by the EPE Indigenous Circle brokering lived-experience stories to policy makers. Future challenges will be gathering such input into the movement with a goal of bringing various groups, organizations, different orders of government and members of many communities together and choose a collective impact approach. With the collective knowledge, Year One can be seen as the year that was used to make big plans for change and that the EPE Secretariat is now set up to support this movement.

I would like to end this review by emphasizing the need for reliable data to ensure the effectiveness of the EPE Secretariat and its collaborations. Progress in actual implementation is needed through shared, meaningful evaluation and data, as well as in-person educational events to share to the public about what EPE is learning from the inclusion of people with lived experience of poverty. At a broader level, it's important to ensure that all the road map actions outlined by Game Changers are accessible for people with lived experiences of poverty such that they are not further marginalized, tokenized or stigmatized when working with EPE.

Publication Source:

EndPovertyEdmonton (2018). Year One Progress Report 2017-18. Retrieved from:

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54eb5df3e4b0904aceb80bc4/t/5b734f3d2b6a28cd5b3c0bdc/1534283628713/EPE-YearOne_WEB-Final_v3.pdf

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REVIEWER:

Yasmin Hussein worked this summer as a student research assistant for the Edmonton Social Planning Council. She recently returned to the University of Alberta to complete a Bachelor of Science degree in Physiology.

ALBERTA MINIMUM WAGE PROFILE

REVIEWED BY RYAN DEXTER

On October 1st, 2017, Alberta's minimum wage increased from \$12.20 an hour to \$13.60 an hour, and on October 1st, 2018, the minimum wage is, again, set to increase, this time to \$15.00 an hour. There has been much controversy about the consequences of raising the minimum wage to \$15.00, as some people think the raise will hurt business and result in less hiring in low wage industry, such as retail and food service. Still others contend it will improve the lives of some of the most vulnerable people who earn minimum wage.

Although there is "a considerable amount" (Rybczynski & Sen, 2018, p. 116) of research on minimum wage, there is "a sharp divide" (Rybczynski & Sen, 2018, p. 116) in the studies concerning the effects minimum wage legislation has on the "employment of teens and/or unskilled workers" (Rybczynski & Sen, 2018, p. 116). This comes in a year when "Canadian CEOs are again taking home pre-2008-crisis levels of compensation, pushing the income gap between Canada's top executives and the average worker to record highs" (MacDonald, 2018, p. 4), and while Canada's CEOs "were among the loudest critics of plans to raise minimum wages in several provinces" (MacDonald, 2018, p. 6).

Given that the goal, originally, of minimum wage legislation "was to prevent the exploitation of workers by firms, which then evolved to ensure workers received a livable wage and, subsequently to protect women and young workers from discrimination" (Rybczynski & Sen, 2018, p. 119), it is important to understand who will benefit from the effects of minimum wage legislation. For this reason, the *Alberta Minimum Wage Profile presents* statistics on persons who earn minimum wage, as well as percentages of employees who earn minimum wage and the characteristics of those employees (Alberta Minimum Wage Profile, 2018, p. 1). Alberta (\$13.60), next to Ontario (\$14.00), has the second highest minimum wage in Canada, though only Alberta is proceeding with a minimum wage increase to \$15.00 on October 1st, 2018. A planned increase to \$15.00 in Ontario was cancelled after the election of a new Conservative government there.

Measuring from April 2017 to March 2018, a profile of minimum wage earners emerged in the province of Alberta. 28.8% of minimum wage earners are between 15-19 years old, the largest group, while 20-24 year olds, at 20.5%, are the second largest group of minimum wage earners; therefore 39.5% of minimum wage earners lived with their parents, while 28.3% were students. 51.8% of minimum wage earners worked part-time, and 73.4% were permanently employed; 40.2% of those who earned minimum wage were parents, while 13.0% belonged to a family with a single earner. Females counted for 62.5% of minimum wage earners, up from 57.8% from the previous period. Minimum wage earners as a whole, mostly had either some high school (22.7%), completed high school (28.7%), or did not have high school (28.5%). 59.4% of minimum wage earners worked in either the Retail Trade, and Accommodation or Food Services industries.

Given that most of Alberta's minimum wage workers are young, female, working in the retail trades or food services industries, and a large minority lived with their parents and were students, the minimum wage legislation still serves the purpose of securing livable wages for the young and/or unskilled workers. Rybczynski

& Sen found that “minimum wage laws do not have significant employment effects” (2018, p. 131), meaning they found minimum wage legislation did not result in less hiring for the 15-19 years old group of minimum wage earners. Questions arise about how many of these minimum wage earners will eventually transition to higher earning careers, and how to best aid those stuck in chronic unemployment, low wage work, and poverty.

Works Cited:

MacDonald, David. (2018). Climbing Up and Kicking Down: Executive Pay in Canada. Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives.

Rybczynski, Kate and Aninda Sen. (2018). “Employment Effects of the Minimum Wage: Panel Data Evidence From Canadian Provinces”. *Contemporary Economic Policy*. Vol 36, No 1, 116-135.

Publication Source: Government of Alberta. (2018). Alberta Minimum Wage Profile: April 2017-March 2018. Retrieved from: <https://work.alberta.ca/documents/alberta-minimum-wage-profile.pdf>

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REVIEWER:

Ryan Dexter has volunteered with ESPC for several years. He enjoys participating and being involved in social justice work in his local community and working towards positive social change.

IMPACTS OF SIGNIFICANT MINIMUM WAGE INCREASE

REVIEWED BY AKSHYA BOOPALAN

The NDP Government is increasing minimum wage to \$15 per hour in 2018 to help reduce poverty in Alberta. Through this issue the Alberta Chambers of Commerce is looking at effects of increasing minimum wage on employers, employees and on poverty.

The authors make a comparison and calculate where the provinces rank in highest salary after tax, based on 2,000 hours of minimum wage work. 2,000 hours is a full-time job, working around 41 hours per week for one year. Currently Alberta has an hourly minimum wage of \$13.60, and personal income tax rate at 10.00%. The total salary after including all applicable taxes is \$23,023.64 for Albertans, and ranks second highest in salary across provinces. Ontario ranks the first highest in salary with \$23,218.36, with their hourly minimum range as \$14.00, and personal income tax rate at 5.05%.

If the minimum wage in Alberta increases to \$15 per hour and the personal income tax rate stays the same, lower income wages earners still earn less than \$30,000 on 2,000 hours of work. Using the law of demand, the authors suggest that when the price of labor for minimum wage job rises, employers will try to mitigate this increase by labour-saving methods due to decrease in quantity demanded. This could be in ways such as hiring workers that are more skilled in being able to perform more than one type of role in their job, or by letting go of youth workers who are usually still developing their skills.

The underlying premise for minimum wage increases seems to be that employers will cover this increase in labour costs from the profits the company/employer makes. However, it is possible that employers will let go of unskilled workers rather than simply increasing their market prices as most industries are highly competitive and need to sell products at an affordable range or risk losing their market value. The authors reason that more jobs will be lost especially at the entry-level positions. This type of job loss will lead to long-term consequences, not only for employers but for society.

Getting into the job force at a young age provides youth with a chance to develop their professional skills, promotes job growth and reduces unemployment in the province. This applies for any worker at an entry-level or minimum wage-earning position. Reducing skill acquisition will lead to poor quality of work in the long run. When unemployment rises, many people in society would have no income to contribute to taxes or provide good quality services within companies as the pressure to perform more than one job role increases as well. Unemployment increase also means that the main issue of poverty that the government is trying to address may only become more prevalent.

The minimum wage in the province could be determined by calculating average living costs, transportation costs and anything needed for basic needs in that region, but the authors are unclear whether the Government of Alberta has done the research. The increase to \$15 minimum wage may not fully address the varying living wage rate across Alberta, which may lead to discrepancy in addressing poverty issues. An issue I found was that the Alberta Chambers of Commerce suggest that the minimum wage stay low so that regions can compete fairly. The authors also suggest that the Government of Alberta conduct more thorough research as to how raising minimum wage will address poverty with such consequences. Thus, the Provincial government can research which regions in Alberta could benefit in the short-run and address larger-scale issues in the long term.

Along with the above suggestions, the Alberta Chambers of Commerce have a few suggestions for a better framework – increasing minimum wage according to the change in Alberta Consumer Price Index, having a specialized minimum wage for students under 18, review personal income tax for low-income Albertans and continue to provide one year’s notice for changes in this area. This issue shows that thorough, multi-level and public research needs to be carried out on how poverty can be addressed by wage increases. It may provide a clearer vision on how to effectively reduce poverty in Alberta.

Publication Source:

Alberta Chambers of Commerce (2018). Impacts of Significant Minimum Wage Increase. Retrieved from: https://chambermaster.blob.core.windows.net/userfiles/UserFiles/chambers/2087/CMS/2018_Policies/Impacts-of-Significant-Minimum-Wage-Increase.pdf

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REVIEWER:

Akshya Boopalan has a degree in psychology and anthropology and a keen interest in social research. She works with people with autism, developmental disabilities and brain injuries.

In recent studies, a significant factor increasing the risk of youth homelessness in Canada is the involvement of youth in child protection services and welfare. Along with other structural and systemic disadvantages, such as poverty or racism, faced by youth-at-risk, these findings exhibit the demand for governmental action and policy change to assist young Canadians in need. As such, a proposal for action that outlines current knowledge on this topic as well as providing policy recommendations and research is required to address this societal dilemma.

In Nichols et al.'s (2017) proposal for action, the authors indicate the primary links for youth homelessness and child welfare involvement as well as providing recommendations for federal, provincial, and territorial governments and child protection service providers. This research review will summarise Nichols et al.'s findings, provide an overview of the recommendations given, and indicate how the proposal can be used to inform current and future policy.

Nichols et al. (2017) indicate four areas of concern that contribute to the link between child welfare involvement and youth homelessness. These areas are:

- housing instability in care, frequent changes in housing and the removal of youth from their family home at a young age;
- difficult transitions from care in terms of aging out of care and the lack of support in the long-term;
- early experiences of homelessness where the younger the individual experiencing homelessness, the more likely they are to report experiencing significant adversity before they became homeless;
- inequality and the overrepresentation of particular races, ethnicities, and classes in current research, which is linked to structural disadvantage and marginalization.

Given this knowledge on the current status of youth homelessness and its relationship with child welfare involvement, Nichols et al. (2017) indicate that there is no direct causal effect relationship. That being said, although there is no causal relationship but rather a strong link between youth homelessness and child welfare involvement, the child welfare system can be shifted towards prevention rather than addressing the problem symptomatically. The authors note that a policy shift towards equitable policy-making and positive youth development for long-term wellbeing is required. Thus it is recommended that a coordinated and collaborative effort is enacted by the three orders of government, and by frequently used youth services such as health, housing and child protection.

The authors' recommendations are summarized as follows:

- (1) An understanding that while child protection legislation is the responsibility for provinces and territories, a federal collaboration can provide better support and transitioning for youth leaving care.
- (2) Provincial and territorial governments should guarantee youth entering child welfare that continual supports including stable housing will be provided and harm reduction strategies and models will be followed until the youth reaches the age of 25.
- (3) Provincial and territorial governments should implement a strategy to support racialized and LGBTQ2S youth that allows for prevention and generates positive long-term wellbeing.

- (4) Child protection services and workers should follow strengths-based policy such that youth are provided with clear supports tailored to their needs in order to build resilience.
- (5) Child protection services and workers should also create a standardised assessment tool to determine homelessness and flight risk. This tool would be beneficial to further tailor needs and supports for youth in need.

In sum, Nichols et al.'s report provides a comprehensive analysis with theory-based recommendations that can be used to inform current and future policy. However, because it is purely research and theory-based, further research for the child protection services sector should analyse longitudinal studies with key groups, such as racialized or LGBTQ2S youth involved with child welfare, with these recommendations in mind. From there, a bottom-up approach in research should be examined to address the issue as per the authors' recommendations to all three orders of government.

Publication Source: Naomi Nichols et.al., Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (2017). Child Welfare and Youth Homelessness in Canada: A Proposal for Action. Retrieved from:

http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/ChildWelfare-PolicyBrief-final_0.pdf

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REVIEWER:

Janine Isaac recently finished her second degree at the University of Alberta in Human Geography and Planning. Her current research interests include women and children's rights and gender issues in planning policy, homelessness, and city housing.

ALBERTA 2018 POINT-IN-TIME HOMELESS COUNT

REVIEWED BY MICHELLE SORENSON

During a 24 hour period on April 11 and 12, 2018, agencies in each of the seven largest cities in Alberta conducted a point-in-time (PIT) count of their homeless population. The Edmonton count was conducted by Homeward Trust. Volunteers walked through areas most commonly frequented by persons who are homeless, conducting surveys and taking tallies of those they observed and interviewed. The Edmonton Social Planning Council's new office in Central McDougall served as one of the base sites for the evening count. Data from hospitals, emergency shelters, transitional housing, detox/treatment centers, government-sponsored hotels, and correctional facilities were also reported.

The count included individuals who are unsheltered (those who do not access any type of public or private shelter, except during extreme weather; many live in makeshift shelters or tents), emergency sheltered, and provisionally accommodated (those who access short-term accommodations, with no possibility of staying there permanently). Efforts were made to avoid double counting the same individuals.

This was the third time that the 7 cities worked together to conduct a province-wide PIT count of the homeless population, however it was the first time that the count was federally initiated, as part of Everyone Counts 2018.

Key Characteristics

Of the 5,735 people counted across Alberta, 49% were classified as provisionally accommodated, 47% as emergency sheltered, and 3% as unsheltered. Calgary had the largest population of individuals who were homeless (2,911), followed by Edmonton (1,971), Grande Prairie (228), Lethbridge (223), Fort McMurray (190), Red Deer (144), and Medicine Hat (68). Grande Prairie however, had the highest rate of homelessness (36 per 10,000), followed by Fort McMurray (29 per 10,000), Calgary (23 per 10,000), Lethbridge (23 per 10,000), Edmonton (21 per 10,000), Red Deer (14 per 10,000), and Medicine Hat (11 per 10,000).

Province-wide, the results indicated that males (72%) outnumbered females (28%) by more than two-to-one, and that transgender individuals made up 0.2% of the homeless population. Of those who were willing to participate in the survey, the large majority (81%) were between 25-64 years old, with 16% under 25 years old, and 3% over 65 years of age. Indigenous populations were over-represented, making up 26% of those surveyed, compared to 7% of the general population. Among the youth population (18-24), 33% identified as Indigenous.

Individuals described numerous reasons for housing loss including addiction or substance abuse (25%), job loss (16%), not being able to pay their rent or mortgage (15%), conflict with a spouse or partner (9%), unsafe housing conditions (9%), and mental health (8%), among others. Many people identified multiple reasons for homelessness. They also identified multiple sources of income, including welfare and social assistance (31%), employment (12%), disability benefit (12%), and informal self-employment (11%), among others. Nearly a quarter of those surveyed said they received no income at all.

Of those who had recently moved into a community, the top four reasons for relocating were to seek out employment (19%), to follow family who had moved to the community (13%), to access services and supports (12%), and for already secured employment (8%).

Individuals were grouped into four categories of homelessness: chronic (those who have spent more than 180 cumulative nights in a shelter or space unfit for long-term human habitation), episodic (those who have stayed

in a shelter or space unfit for human habitation, and after at least 30 days found themselves back in the shelter or inhabitable location), transitional (those who live in transitional housing for a maximum of two years), and unknown. Across Alberta, chronic homelessness (62%) made up the most significant portion of those surveyed, as compared to transitional homelessness (22%) and episodic homelessness (6%).

Methodological Considerations

Reliable, high-quality statistics play an important role in the development of effective programs and policies to alleviate poverty, however gathering this type of data can be very challenging. Though the PIT count provides valuable information about homeless populations throughout Alberta, there are many limitations to how this data can be interpreted and used, given the short collection period and inconsistencies between agencies and individual volunteers collecting the data. Over the last six years the PIT Homeless Count has been improved and refined substantially, making it difficult to compare results year-over-year. Further adjustments are planned for the next Alberta PIT Homeless Count in 2020. The statistics are perhaps most appropriately used when combined with other research around poverty and homelessness in cities across Alberta.

Publication Source:

7 Cities on Housing and Homelessness (2018). Alberta Point-in-Time Homeless Count Technical Report.

Retrieved from: https://docs.wixstatic.com/uqd/ff2744_5d899dceff12471c835fddf4e5d119fc.pdf

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REVIEWER:

Michelle Sorenson has worked as an elementary and special education teacher in rural Alberta. She recently completed an MBA at the University of Alberta focused on non-profit management and social entrepreneurship.

“Through our research, analysis, and engagement, we hope to create a community in which all people are full and valued participants.”

—The Edmonton Social Planning Council

ABOUT ESPC

The ESPC is an independent, non-profit, charitable organization. Our focus is social research, particularly in the areas of low income and poverty.

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.

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THE RESEARCH UPDATE:

The Edmonton Social Planning Council, in collaboration with our volunteers, strive to provide stakeholders and community members with up-to-date reviews on recently published social research reports.

Interested in volunteering? Email johnk@edmontonsocialplanning.ca