

THE FACTIVIST

Focus on Race and Equity





The **FACTIVIST** is published four times a year by the Edmonton Social Planning Council. ESPC is an independent, non-profit, charitable organization focused on social research. Articles, quotes, and commentaries reflect the views of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policy of the Edmonton Social Planning Council.

Join our distribution list to receive future newsletters. Click on the **Subscribe Now** button on our website at edmontonsocialplanning.ca/subscribe

Contributors: Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers' Anti-Racism Working Group, Michael Janz, Brett Lambert, Sandra Ngo, Jenn Rossiter, Sydney Sheloff, Asheika Sood, Aastha Tripathi, and Omar Yaqub

Editing: Jenn Rossiter

Usage

This issue of the **FACTIVIST** by the Edmonton Social Planning Council is licensed under a **Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License**.

You are free to:

Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format

Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material

The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms.

Attribution — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

NonCommercial — You may not use the material for commercial purposes.

ShareAlike — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original.

No additional restrictions — You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

CONTENTS

- Executive Director Update - 5
 - Exploring Race-Based Data Needs - 6
 - How Collecting Race-Based Data Can Address Systemic Racism in Public Education - 8
 - A Renewed Commitment to Anti-Racism for Social Agencies - 11
 - Addressing Racialized Populations' Barriers to Affordable Housing - 13
 - How Have Members of Edmonton's Islamic Community Been Doing During the Pandemic? A Summary of Survey Results - 16
 - Bell Let's Talk Day: Social Initiative or PR Ploy? - 19
 - New Social Well-Being Tracker launches - 20
 - [ESPC News and Announcements - 22](#)
 - Rowan El-Bialy joins ESPC as new Research Coordinator - 23
 - Concordia University Practicum Student Reflects on Her Placement with the ESPC - 24
 - About the ESPC - 25
-



LOOKING FOR RESEARCH ASSISTANCE?

The Edmonton Social Planning Council provides FREE research services to social advocacy organizations in Edmonton! We provide support to those seeking publications or statistics in social policy areas such as:

Housing, Transportation, Health, Education, Food Security, Income Security Programs, Urban Issues, Social Services, Women, Disabilities, Poverty, Immigration, Families, Children and Child Care, Seniors, Indigenous Peoples, Labour Force, Crime and Safety ... and more!

If you or your organization needs a hand finding information about local social issues or related topics, contact:

Jenn Rossiter, Research Services and Capacity Building Coordinator

Phone: 780.423.2031

Email: jennr@edmontonsocialplanning.ca



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR UPDATE

Susan Morrissey

Welcome to the spring issue of the fACTivist!

With the weather getting warmer, and vaccinations against the COVID-19 virus rolling out after a full year into the pandemic, we enter the spring season with a sense of hope that a return to some semblance of “normal” is now on the horizon.

Nevertheless, it has become quite clear that “normal” is simply not enough. This certainly has been true for our most vulnerable populations—planning for a post-pandemic future must prioritize and center these groups.

We have learned over the past year that a just and inclusive recovery must bring about a renewed commitment to anti-racism initiatives. Systemic racism has permeated nearly all facets of our society, particularly our institutions, and we must focus our efforts to confront the harms caused.

In this issue, we shine a spotlight on racial justice, focusing on the inequities and injustices that are a persistent challenge to making progress and sparking positive change. We recently released a feature report, written by Jenn Rossiter and Tom Ndekezi, titled *Confronting Racism with Data: Why Canada Needs Disaggregated Race-Based Data*, which seeks to add nuance to the ongoing discussion. It also suggests ways for systems to improve, or implement, data collection strategies that result in reliable, high-quality, and comparable data—based firmly on national-level standards. I want to commend Jenn and Tom for this undertaking and I hope the report can educate the public, as well as policy-makers, on this critical subject.

Also in this issue, you’ll find reflections on work undertaken within social services to address systemic racism. To highlight this important work, we have a submission from the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers’ Anti-Racism Working Group, as well as a reflection from outgoing Edmonton Public School Board Trustee Michael Janz that focuses on what needs to be done within the public education system. In addition, we analyze the Government of Alberta’s final report from the Affordable Housing Review Panel and explore how their recommendations can bring meaningful change to racialized groups who disproportionately face barriers to access affordable housing.

Taking into account the lived experiences of racialized groups is also paramount to delivering services that are responsive to their needs. At the start of the pandemic, we partnered with the Islamic Family and Social Services Association (IFSSA) to deliver a survey to their clients on how they have been doing, where they have gotten their pandemic information, and what their most pressing concerns have been. We’re pleased to share IFSSA’s summary of the results in this issue.

In other matters, our practicum student Aastha Tripathi (who has been with us since September 2020) reflects on her placement with us and how her work experience strengthened her knowledge and skills on issues of low-income and poverty. On top of that, Aastha also wrote an essay that takes a critical look at the Bell Let’s Talk Day and contributes discourse on its impact. The essay explores whether Let’s Talk has meaningfully improved mental health initiatives when Bell’s own telecommunications practices have resulted in increased vulnerability among prison populations in their attempts to connect with mental health support.

We’re also pleased to unveil our new online Social Well-Being Tracker. This project transforms the existing *Tracking the Trends* report into an interactive online format that makes data searchable and provides quick links so users can hop to the topics they are most interested in. I want to extend my thanks to our former Research Coordinator, Sandra Ngo, for her hard work in making this happen!

I hope you enjoy this latest issue of the fACTivist and look forward to gathering together physically once again after we are all vaccinated!



Susan Morrissey,
Executive Director



The data can also remind decision-makers that racialized communities are not homogenous; understanding the multifaceted issues that affect racialized individuals in Canada would help guide targeted, effective policy change that can work to dismantle systemic racism.

Exploring Race-Based Data Needs

By Jenn Rossiter

Jenn Rossiter is the Research Services and Capacity Building Coordinator and Volunteer Coordinator for the Edmonton Social Planning Council.

In February, the Edmonton Social Planning Council (ESPC) published a feature report titled *Confronting Racism with Data: Why Canada Needs Disaggregated Race-Based Data*. The importance of data to provide evidence of injustice, discrimination, and systemic racism across the country is not new insight. For decades, advocates for communities experiencing marginalization and inequity have been calling on Canadians to standardize the collection of this evidence as a means to inform decision-makers.

The report highlights several meaningful discussions among researchers and advocates around the benefits and challenges of race-based data collection, including:

- the distinction between race and ethnicity;
- risks and rewards attributed to data collection strategies and use;
- current data collection issues and efforts within the health care, education, and justice systems;
- support for community-based data sovereignty—particularly First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities;
- legislation in Canada that addresses race-based data as an anti-racism tool within, and across, systems; and

- connections between race-based data and intersectionality.

The need for race-based data has become especially poignant as Canadians face, and continue to respond to, inequalities exacerbated by COVID-19. Socially and economically disadvantaged populations have been disproportionately impacted throughout the pandemic. We know, for example—based on some of the limited data available—that one-fifth of employed Black Canadians currently work in the health care system, which puts them at greater risk of exposure to the virus. [1]

It's worth noting that there isn't necessarily a lack of data but rather a systemic misuse of data—though not necessarily used for intentional harm. Most current data collection strategies require significant improvements to collect high-quality and comparable information that can lead to the development of effective policies and programs that help communities thrive. Data can tell us that only 21.2% of university teachers in post-secondary are racialized. [2] However, without rigorous strategies and standards, it's difficult to effectively connect stand-alone statistics like that to systemic issues in recruitment and hiring practices, representation in post-secondary leadership, or even racialized student success. The goal is not to increase the

number of interventions for particular issues, but, rather, to collect high-quality, comparable data. The results would give decision-makers hard evidence that ultimately could lead to systems-level changes that would reach various populations and interrupt ongoing, harmful, discriminatory policies and practices.

Data collection strategies must be developed in collaboration with the diverse communities that are impacted by racism and discrimination, and with the intention to target and improve services as a means to close gaps that have resulted from inequities. The value of having communities help interpret and analyze the data—to understand the impacts and contextualize the information—is undeniable. Collaboration deters colonial practice and connects the issues demonstrated by data as a representation of real people living very real lives.

Data can help sift through the complexities that affect racialized communities across Canada. If collected using standardized practices, race-based data can provide hard evidence to complement anecdotal information shared by individuals who have lived experiences. Together, these powerful stories highlight the unique and complex identities of individuals and inequities faced by diverse populations. The data can also remind decision-makers that racialized communities are not homogenous; understanding the multifaceted issues that affect racialized individuals in Canada would help guide targeted, effective policy change that can work to dismantle systemic racism. Broader, systemic change can then have a direct, positive impact on the lives of Canadians. If we focus policies and interventions on the most marginalized in society, every Canadian benefits.

The full report is available on our website: <https://edmontonsocialplanning.ca/2021/02/24/feature-report-confronting-racism-with-data-why-canada-needs-disaggregated-race-based-data/>

References

[1] Statistics Canada. (2021, March 5). A Data story: Data-driven Insights on the Black Communities in Canada [video]. Statistics Canada. <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/sc/video/black-history-month-20210224>

[2] Canadian Association of University Teachers. (2018). Underrepresented and underpaid: Diversity and equity among Canada's post-secondary education teachers. https://www.caut.ca/sites/default/files/caut_equity_report_2018-04final.pdf



Become a Member

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 Benefits:

- Be a part of making Edmonton a community in which all people are full and valued participants.
- Support our ability to distribute our material freely and widely.
- Have a say in the direction of the organization. Access opportunities to serve on the Board of Directors.
- 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 edmontonsocialplanning.ca/membership



How Collecting Race-Based Data Can Address Systemic Racism in Public Education

By Michael Janz

Michael Janz is a three-term trustee of Ward F for the Edmonton Public School Board.

I commend the Edmonton Social Planning Council on their report, *Confronting Racism with Data: Why Canada Needs Disaggregated Race-Based Data*, which calls for disaggregated race-based data across Canada. Educational policies especially must consider how outcomes ranging from achievement, discipline, or attendance data are impacted by racism.

As an 11-year Edmonton Public School Trustee, here are a few of my reflections for action for Edmonton Public Schools, Edmonton, and Alberta. As Edmonton Public Schools start to collect this data, public pressure will mount for Edmonton Catholic, Elk Island, Sherwood Park, Calgary, and other school districts to do the same. The ability to quantify the impacts of racial injustice, beyond anecdotal evidence, provides clear patterns and trends to support the need to create change and address the existing inequities through appropriate interventions.

When You Know Better, You Can (and Should) Take Action to Do Better

Race-based data allows the district to identify gaps in the delivery of education, which in turn will lead to the development of better programming to ensure student success. The areas are not restricted to achievement, discipline, and attendance.

In September 2020, Edmonton Public Schools became the first school jurisdiction in Alberta to commit to collecting race-based data. You can read the [recommendation report that was passed unanimously by the Board of Trustees here](#). Trustees voted unanimously to collect the data with the intention to identify and address gaps that exist in education for racialized communities. We have heard these concerns from members of the community over a number of years about gaps and inequities, and now we are going to measure and act accordingly.

The Toronto District School Board has been collecting race-based data since 2006. Ontario began collecting data as a province in 2006.

Alberta School Boards are required to report on disaggregated student achievement data for students who self-identify as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit, but there is no broader collection of race-based data. This model has been billed as a significant undertaking and could take up to two years. Engagement is underway with community partners.

Nothing About Us, Without Us

We know that data can be misused, so conversations about communities impacted by racism—especially to protect family concerns regarding privacy and use of data—are essential. However, school boards have collected and reported on self-identified First Nations data for at least 20 years, as has Toronto and Ontario, so clearly there are working models that could allow us to move quickly.

Additionally, we need to make sure that data is not misused with a deficit lens and that we do not run into the same problems we've seen with school rankings. The problem is not the students—the problem is the surrounding context.

Addressing Racism in Education

In June 2020, the Board of Trustees released a statement acknowledging that racism and discrimination exist in our Division and we have work to do to address this.

We are undertaking a number of initiatives such as:

- Pushing pause on the School Resource Officer program to study the impacts, as well as removing the armed, uniformed, police officers until further notice.
- Developing a model to collect race-based data for students within the Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB).
- Advocating to Minister of Education Adriana LaGrange to collect race-based data across Alberta.

It is important to me and a number of other trustees that these measures are not limited to students, but that future boards implement greater disaggregated collection for staff and families as well.

Maximizing Efficacy of Interventions

With race-based data, you can target interventions and investments in strategies that support the students who need the most help. We know that funding cuts hurt our families, in particular the most vulnerable experiencing racism. Right now, in Edmonton Public Schools, we make certain budget decisions based on a neighbourhood social vulnerability index. We do not have the data to better target interventions based on varying intersections, such as socio-economics, race, and other factors. Many families are experiencing poverty—including refugee, Indigenous, and

newcomer students and those from lower socio-economic areas that have disproportionately racialized populations.

Systemic Racism in Education Budgets

When you look at the broken weighted moving average formula (which assigns more weight to recent data and less on past data) brought in by the provincial UCP government, fewer funds are flowing from the Legislature to the districts that are more urban and racially diverse. As a result, the students who need the most attention and support will be competing with a growing number of other students for a limited pool of money.

Put simply: fewer students in rural Alberta, but the same funding per student. More students in Calgary and Edmonton, but less funding per student.

While the per student amount in 2022 will be lower than in 2018—and we know that more racialized students per capita live in Edmonton and Calgary—the funding model for education is another example of systemic racism.

I realize these may seem like broad, sweeping generalizations, but this underscores why race-based data collection is essential.

Staffing and Leadership

Edmonton's student body and city are incredibly diverse; teaching staff, and particularly the administration, are less so.

Our staff pool is not reflective of that diversity, with visible minorities more represented in certain groups (custodial) than in teaching. Of school leadership, our principals are reflective of our teaching cohort and are not reflective of the racial diversity of the students and families they serve. Elected Public, Catholic, and Francophone School Trustees even less so.

Many big questions come to mind. Race and layoffs. Who do layoffs most affect? What can we do to increase the pool of available teachers at Concordia University or the University of Alberta? What are the barriers for completing high school in Edmonton and entering teacher college?

Complex Solutions

Seeds can't grow in weeds and until we can pull out the weeds of poverty, racism, and injustice, the schools in our community garden will not truly flourish.

A teacher can only impact a child for, at most, one-third of a day. Whether the child arrives at school ready to learn, is fed, properly clothed and supported, and can engage in learning has a dramatic impact on their ability to participate. Do they feel safe and that they belong at school? Did the transit police harass them on the way? Did the School Resource Officer profile them? After school, what opportunities for support, enrichment, or music can they experience?

Ending racism has been identified as one of the [six game changers by End Poverty Edmonton](#). Data, including that collected and analyzed by the Edmonton Social Planning Council, clearly shows that there is a higher proportion of people of visible minority and Indigenous backgrounds experiencing poverty than other groups.

Systemic Racism is One Thing, Actual Racism is Another

Over the last decade, we've seen at EPSB enormous strides in our work to create a sense of belonging for sexual orientation and gender identity among our students, staff, and families. We need to build on, and do better with, an intersectional lens for all groups.

Beyond EPSB policies, we need provincial change. I put forward a motion in October 2020 ([passed unanimously](#)) for the provincial curriculum to be explicitly anti-racist and for funding, professional development, and anti-racism training to be available for teachers.

Outside of our school buildings, we need actual enforcement of public safety for all of us. We need to prosecute hate crimes and not allow a dismissal by police services. Measures by municipalities can be taken to ban racist symbols such as tiki torches at protests. If we can ban conversion therapy in Edmonton, surely we can put forward even stronger action to end racism and discrimination.



A Renewed Commitment to Anti-Racism for Social Agencies

By the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers' Anti-Racism Working Group

The EMCN Anti-Racism Working Group consists of Steffanie Beekman, Suzanne Gross, Ricki Justice, Eun Jin Kim, Melani Orr, Jianyu Song, Megan Starchuk, and Rispah Tremblay.

The Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN) is a settlement organization that began supporting newcomers to Canada in 1981 as a project of the local Mennonite churches. EMCN was incorporated as a community agency in 1983. We serve newcomers in the areas of language instruction, settlement, employment, and community engagement supports and programs. Through our work, we collaborate to build on the resilience of over 12,000 newcomers a year as they settle in Edmonton.

While EMCN has always strived for inclusivity in its services, it has become clear that there is still a lot of work to do in adopting a robust framework for anti-racism and further its practices in Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI).

EMCN Engagement with Anti-Racism and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Since the brutal murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officers came to world-wide attention on May 25, 2020, we at EMCN have been reignited in our quest for addressing the tragedies that grow out of the racism that permeates our culture, our structures, and ultimately our whole society.

EMCN has lofty values guiding our work that merge the nuances of social justice, diversity, compassion, and responsibility. Even before the murder of George Floyd we were exploring how to bring the lens of EDI in a more intentional way into our awareness, to ensure we are living by its principles—enriched and deepened by the context of the values we aspire to live by.

Since May and June of last year, the reality of racism has galvanized us to add anti-racism to the work we are doing together. We began our most recent journey with a statement of support posted on June 5, 2020. Parts of the statement read as follows:

As a settlement agency welcoming and supporting newcomers from around the world, including the very people who too often experience racism in our community of Edmonton, we at EMCN feel compelled to speak out and to actively engage in creating deep and lasting change.

We stand with those who have suffered racism and with those who negotiate daily for dignity and human rights in our flawed social structures. We will partner with our systems to dismantle that which demands dismantling and work together to generate new systems that do not oppress certain people while unjustly empowering others. We will remain steadfast in our commitment to build mutual relationships between newcomers and Indigenous peoples, as well as all groups facing racism, as a way to rewrite the toxic narratives that divide us. Moving forward, we will create forums to share stories and experiences of the impacts of racism. Together we will uncover ways to be allied in our goal to build healthy and just communities, informing the anti-racism work within our agency and all our relationships.

It is easy to make statements, and much harder to live into them. Since the posting of this statement we have done the following work:

Created an ad-hoc anti-racism working group that looked at guidance for finding a place to start. Much of what we read reminded us over and over that without trained leadership that champions this difficult work, we would not achieve lasting and sustainable change.

Engaged with experts to explore who could best support us on our journey.

Contracted with the Multicultural Family Resource Society, an organization that offers training in this area, and landed on a suite of activities. These included staff focus groups (to serve as an agency audit of current staff experiences with respect to EDI), as well as training in tools for leadership to use as we set priorities and begin to imagine changes that will strengthen our agency EDI through the lens of anti-racism and anti-oppression.

Committed, in the meantime, to honouring days of significance including religious and cultural days to honour our varied stories, as well as days or months that remind us of our past histories. We organized an [Orange Shirt Day](#) event, and have had several opportunities to explore Black History in Canada. We have begun to explore ways to empower staff to plan and execute activities, and to share their own personal connections to the cultural holidays and celebrations. We see this as a significant commitment to our collective EDI work as it creates a space for meaningful conversation and different perspectives, as well as culture exchange that is personal and contextual to our diverse EMCN community. Through these opportunities, our goal is to uplift voices that are not always heard.

Our work is just beginning. As we set priorities to ensure we have the right voices contributing to our efforts to support newcomers, and in our efforts to walk with Edmonton citizens and systems to welcome newcomers, we will strive to create forums that capture these voices to help us all learn—and through that, create the change that needs to be made for the good of us all.



The Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN) was established in 1981 in response to a growing number of Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian refugees arriving to Canada after a long protracted war in their countries of origin. This settlement agency was established to help newcomers in their integration process and to advocate for them when the system did not serve them adequately. EMCN works with up to 17,000 newcomers each year, from all parts of the world, out of five locations and various community locations.

For more information on the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN) please visit:

<http://emcn.ab.ca/>



Volunteer

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.

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

Contact Jenn Rossiter (jennr@edmontonsocialplanning.ca) if you have any suggestions or questions about volunteering with ESPC.



Addressing Racialized Populations' Barriers to Affordable Housing

By Sydney Sheloff and Brett Lambert

Sydney Sheloff is Research Officer and Brett Lambert is Community Engagement Coordinator for the Edmonton Social Planning Council.

Among Canadians who experience homelessness or housing instability, there is a disproportionate number who come from racialized populations—this can include Indigenous peoples, refugees, and newcomers alike. According to data collected by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness' [Homeless Hub](#), the disparities are glaring.

For comparison, about 1 in 5 racialized families in Canada will live in poverty, while only 1 in 20 non-racialized families experience poverty. [1] Among populations experiencing homelessness, 28.2% of them are members of racialized groups, compared to the Canadian average of 19.1%. [1] While Indigenous peoples make up only 4.3% of the overall Canadian population, they comprise 30.6% of the youth homelessness population. [1]

For refugees and newcomers to Canada, one of the biggest challenges is finding housing that is safe, suitable, and affordable. Across Canada, visible minorities make up 40% of renters in affordable and social housing (compared to 32% in market rentals and 23% in home ownership) while Indigenous peoples make up 9.4% of renters in affordable and social

housing (compared to 3.8% of market rentals and 3.1% of home ownership). [2]

Due to long wait times to obtain subsidized housing, these racialized populations may be compelled to look outside of affordable housing options and enter the private housing market. This increases the risk of finding housing that is too expensive, overcrowded, or illegally rented. As a result, they face an increased risk of homelessness and core housing need compared to other groups. About 10% of newcomer youth in Canada experience homelessness. [1]

According to the 2016 federal Census, more than 164,000 households in Alberta are living in unsafe, crowded, and unaffordable housing. [3] As of February 2020, within Edmonton alone nearly 10,000 people were on the wait list for Capital Region Housing's rental assistance program. [4] Among those experiencing homelessness, as of March 2021, 2,072 people in Edmonton are unhoused, according to Homeward Trust Edmonton. [5] Nearly 60% of them identify as Indigenous. [5]

With this in mind, the need to improve the affordable housing situation couldn't be more urgent. In response to this intractable problem, the provincial government put together an Affordable Housing Review Panel in the summer of 2020 to work towards solutions. The panel completed its work and [submitted a report](#) to the minister of Seniors and Housing on October 5, 2020. The full report was released to the public on December 11, 2020. *[Note: The Edmonton Social Planning Council contributed to one of the panel's engagement sessions with key housing sector stakeholders, in addition to a written submission.]*

The panel's recommendations focused on the need to develop provincial strategic plans for housing, encourage municipalities to develop local affordable housing plans, build the capacity of housing providers, and simplify the application process for tenants. It also recommended privatization of the sector by increasing the role of the private sector and shifting the government's role from owner and controller to that of partner and funder. The ministry accepted all of the panel's recommendations.

Knowing the present racial inequities that exist for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) to access housing, will the panel's recommendations help or hinder the pursuit to close the racial gap?

While there is a lot to dissect and unpack in the panel's final report, it is encouraging to see it acknowledged that housing solutions are not suitable to a one-size-fits-all approach and that communities across Alberta, along with different segments within those communities, have unique needs to account for. For example, the report highlights that successful programming for Indigenous peoples require the incorporation of cultural sensitivities. Similarly, immigrant and newcomer families may want housing suitable for large intergenerational families.

With that, the panel's report emphasizes that fairness, equity, and inclusivity need to guide decision-making. Building off of this, the panel sees benefits to housing providers that own and operate their own affordable housing assets because they can more easily address unique housing needs from within the communities they serve, along with other custom solutions to known issues in their respective communities.

This could potentially be a good thing for racialized communities. BIPOC community organizations are likely very well aware of the unique issues that people in their communities face in terms of housing and also likely have unique solutions. For example, in Seattle, [a collective of Black LGBTQ people](#) purchased a plot of land in order to give housing to people in need within their community, as well as to push back against gentrification and displacement. They also built a community garden and healing space to address residents' other needs. Members of the collective, including those who are housed by it, get to make decisions about how their housing is run. Innovative solutions such as these may be limited under the current system.

However, questions arise on whether community organizations have the capacity to own and administer housing. BIPOC communities have faced—and continue to face—social exclusion and economic disenfranchisement, which has limited their resources and power. BIPOC organizations must operate in colonial institutions that have historically oppressed them. Therefore, they may face barriers when attempting to operate housing. Additionally, many of these organizations are already overwhelmed caring for other needs in their community and may not have the time or energy to take on additional housing responsibilities.



While the report does outline the need to ensure sufficient capacity building, more concrete ideas of what capacity development actually looks like is required. Organizations that are Indigenous- or Black-led may need help that differs from that needed by a white-led organization.

An encouraging development is that the panel expressed an interest in rent subsidy programs for those who need temporary support but are not eligible for existing programs. If designed properly, these programs could have the potential to reach some of the most vulnerable populations to access housing, included racialized groups. Of course, this has to be balanced with the knowledge that cuts to rental assistance programs and suspension of housing wait lists occurred within the first year of the United Conservative Party government's term prior to the formation of this panel (notably, this funding was restored in the latest 2021 provincial budget). Any progress stemming from the panel's recommendations has to be tempered with the ground that was lost beforehand.

While the report has starts that are good ideas to deal with the unique housing needs of different racial groups, the explanations in this report seem vague and underdeveloped. Moreover, the prospect of the report being amenable to privatization of the affordable housing sector, and shifting governmental roles and responsibilities onto the private sector, is a source of concern. The needs of the most marginalized people seeking to access housing could fall by the wayside.

There are developments within the panel's report that give reason for hope, but the report does come with important caveats, and the devil will ultimately be in the details.

Sources:

- [1] Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. (n.d.). Racialized Communities. Homeless Hub. <https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/population-specific/racialized-communities>
- [2] Claveau, J. (2020). *The Canadian Housing Survey, 2018: Core housing need of renter households living in social and affordable housing*. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75f0002m/75f0002m2020003-eng.htm>
- [3] Statistics Canada. (2017, November 17). *Core housing need, 2016 census*. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/chn-biml/index-eng.cfm>
- [4] Wyton, M. (2020, February 13). *Edmonton housing assistance waitlist balloons in wake of provincial funding cuts*. The Edmonton Journal. <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/edmonton-housing-assistance-waitlist-balloons-in-wake-of-provincial-funding-cuts>
- [5] Homeward Trust Edmonton. (n.d.). *Program Data*. <https://homewardtrust.ca/what-weve-learned/performance-evaluation/>



How Have Members of Edmonton’s Islamic Community Been Doing During the Pandemic? A Summary of Survey Results

By Omar Yaqub and Asheika Sood

Omar Yaqub is Executive Director of the Islamic Family and Social Services Association. Asheika Sood is a volunteer with the Islamic Family and Social Services Association, as well as the Edmonton Social Planning Council.

Introduction

When lockdowns began as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, Islamic Family and Social Services Association (IFSSA) partnered with the Edmonton Social Planning Council (ESPC) to deliver a survey on the needs of clients in the social services sector.

Working collaboratively, ESPC and IFSSA prepared survey questions jointly and conducted the survey through Survey Monkey with translation and data collection support from a team of IFSSA volunteers. Overall, 68 respondents replied to the survey, but 6 responses were removed from the analysis because they did not wish to be in the summary, making a total of 62 respondents for this report.

Findings

Figure 1: Do You Know What COVID-19 Is?

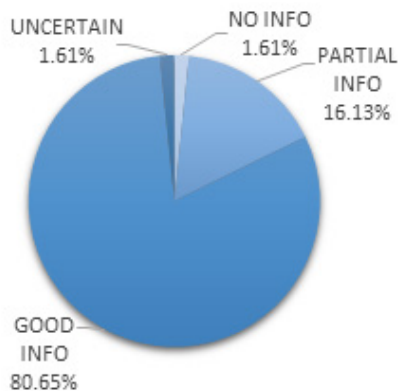
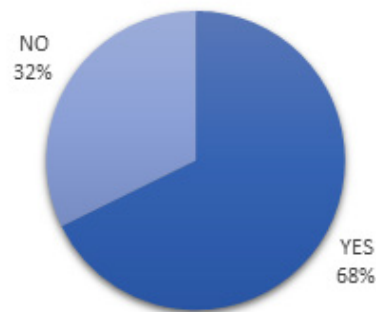


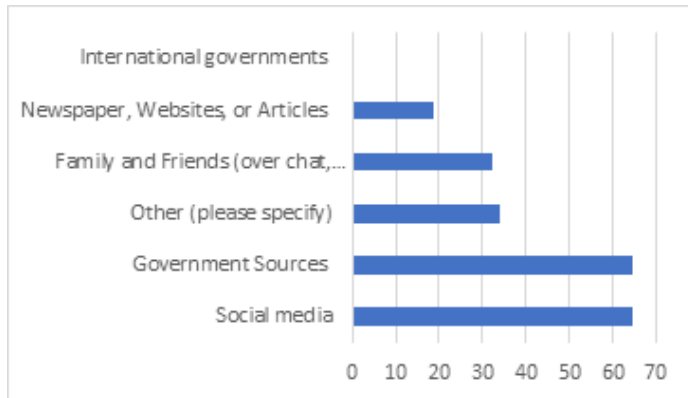
Figure 2: Do You Have the Adequate Resources to Practice Physical Distancing?



What Does This Mean?

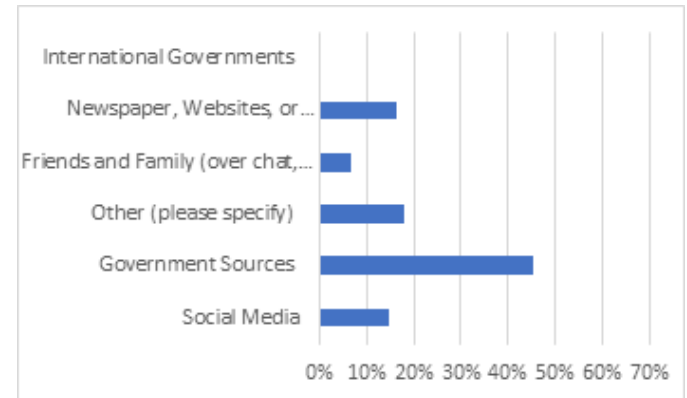
While just under 20% of respondents had partial knowledge, no knowledge, or an uncertain amount of knowledge on COVID-19, 32% did not have the resources required to practice physical distancing. This means that there are clients who are knowledgeable about how to protect themselves from COVID, but still struggle to be able to follow the restrictions due to other barriers of access.

Figure 3: How Do You Access Information on COVID-19? (Percentage of Respondents) 1



1 Other Sources Include: News, Somali TV

Figure 4: Preferred Information Source (Percentage of Respondents) 2



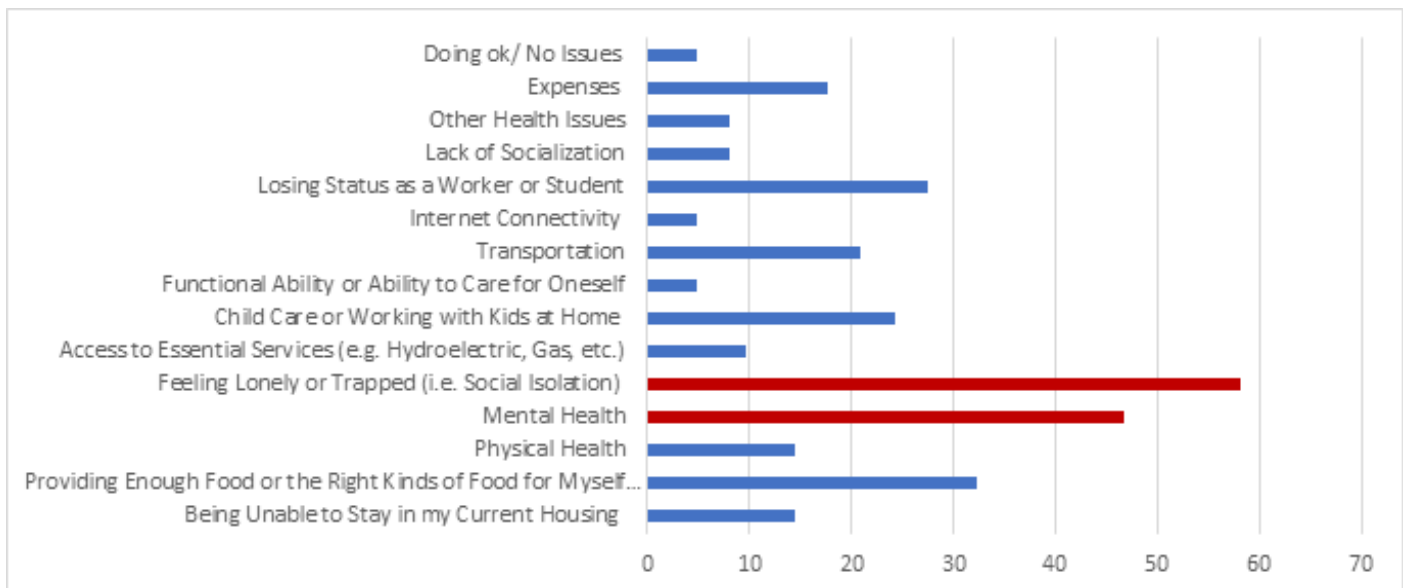
2 Other Sources Include: TV News, AHS Releases, My Teacher, Not Following any of the Listed Sources

What Does This Mean?

Though just over 45% of respondents claim their preferred information source is government sources, in actuality, respondents are equally consuming information from social media, alongside friends and family and other sources like home language news channels on television.

This provides valuable insight for governments and other non-profit agencies looking to communicate information to Islamic community members. One important piece of information is that it can be useful to have mixed-media sources for providing information. It is also essential to consider that social media sources could include mediums like YouTube videos in the native languages of participants. This means if governments and other agencies wish to share information that will reach migrant clients, it can be beneficial to ensure that translated information is available in an auditory format so that people can listen to the information if they are unable to read.

Figure 5: What Are the Biggest Challenges You Face? 3



3 45% of Respondents Faced at least 1 issue outside of these categories, any category with (>3) responses was included in the chart. There are a total of 20 other categories including, but not limited to: Large Household, Lack of Physical Activity, and Public Transit Barriers.

What Does This Mean?

Currently, the top challenges for IFSSA clients are feeling lonely and trapped (58%) as well as mental health concerns (47%). These results call into focus the desperate need for mental health supports and access for clients, and are particularly telling due to the fact that for many of IFSSA's clients the topic of mental health can be taboo. These results also call into question whether agencies have been over-focusing on food security as a primary concern rather than looking at the complete resources clients would need to face the challenges of the pandemic. While it is indeed possible that protective actions early in the pandemic have allowed food access to be less of a concern now at 32%, it is also an important call to both agencies and funders to look to be more flexible and adaptive in their services, as well as to give a keen focus towards mental health resourcing and social supports as a core part of their services moving forward.

Conclusions

This study brought forward key issues such as the importance of increasing mental health access for marginalized communities, reconsidering communication strategies from governments towards immigrant demographics, and ensuring we look at the holistic picture of clients when designing supports.

The original hope for the research was that it could be done across Edmonton with shared questions throughout the social services sector to better understand the pandemic and emerging issues for clients as they arose. While the survey was carried forward this time solely by IFSSA, there is hope in the future for cross-agency co-operation on research. If you are from a social services agency and would like to partner in future research projects, please contact Omar Yaqub at omary@islamicfamily.ca.

Islamic Family and Social Services Association (IFSSA) was established in 1992 by a small group of Muslims in Edmonton. IFSSA works alongside community partners, agencies, and government bodies to provide culturally and spiritually sensitive services that are not found elsewhere. IFSSA serves more than 5,000 people every month, providing clients with access to programs that address food and economic security, domestic violence, relevant and meaningful counselling and outreach, newcomer settlement, belonging and home, and ways to connect to the larger community.

For more information on Islamic Family and Social Services Association (IFSSA) please visit:

<https://www.ifssa.ca/>



Donate

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; allows us to take on bigger projects and make a greater impact in the community, strengthens our voice—your voice—and the voices of those who lack the opportunity to speak for themselves.

To donate please go to: <https://edmontonsocialplanning.ca/donate/>

Bell Let's Talk Day: Social Initiative or PR Ploy?

By Aastha Tripathi

Aastha Tripathi is a Bachelor of Arts student at Concordia University of Edmonton and is currently working with the ESPC as a practicum student. She is expected to graduate in May 2021 and hopes to pursue a Masters in Psychology in the next academic year.

Since 2010, Bell Canada has designated one day out of the year—January 28th—as Bell Let's Talk Day to unite and engage Canadians to take action to create positive change in mental health. As an incentive, the Bell Corporation pledges to donate 5 cents to Canadian mental health initiatives for every text message and social media engagement with the #BellLetsTalk hashtag. This year, Bell advertised the campaign as an opportunity to make our voices heard. This sparked interest amongst Canadians, and the hashtag was used 159,173,435 times across Canada. [1] Furthermore, Bell reports donating a sum of \$8 million to diversity funds, community funds, and significant gifts. [1]

While this may seem like a noble and useful community engagement initiative, it is worth closely examining the agency's pitfalls and shortcomings regarding genuinely tending to Canadians' mental health, particularly those in justice system. It is worth noting that, Bell is the sole provider of the Ontario prison systems' telephone services and fully profits off its contract by limiting calls to 20 minutes and charging upwards of \$30 or more for occasional long-distance phone calls. [2] Furthermore, phone calls are only directed to local landlines, and cost both the offender and the recipient they are trying to reach. [2] The charges are so damaging that the mother of an offender accumulated a bill of \$6,072.12 in just three months by contacting her son who was serving time in the Ottawa-Carleton Detention Centre. [3] His criminal charges were eventually re-evaluated, her phone charges were not.

It is important to note that most of these calls are made to treatment centers, addiction counsellors, mental health supports, community supports, and friends and family. Already isolated in prison, the phone plan severs ties between an offender's support system and hinders their ability to reintegrate back into society seamlessly. These exuberant call costs are worsening the mental health of inmates and increasing their risk of re-offending, as it cuts positive ties between the offender and their community and makes support inaccessible. [2] Meanwhile, Bell has



never disclosed the profits it makes from this contract with the Ontario prison system. However, it proudly advertises its donation to the various mental health initiatives amounting to \$8 million. In return for this donation, Bell Canada is widely advertised and endorsed by celebrities, politicians, and civilians—giving it a powerful platform on social media and the news. Ultimately, though Bell Canada claims to support mental health initiatives in Canada, it fails to consider one of the most isolated and vulnerable populations and continues to profit off their misfortune.

References

[1] Bell Canada. (2021, January 29). *Now more than ever! Bell Let's Talk Day sets new records as Canadians take action for mental health with 159,173,435 messages of support.* <https://letstalk.bell.ca/en/news/1275/now-more-than-ever-bell-lets-talk-day-sets-new-records-as-canadians-take-action-for-mental-health-with-159173435-messages-of-support>

[2] Goodyear, S. (2020, January 29). *Company behind Bell Let's Talk profits off vulnerable inmates through phone deals in jails: Lawyer.* CBC. <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/asithappens/as-it-happens-tuesday-edition-1.5443076/company-behind-bell-let-s-talk-profits-off-vulnerable-inmates-through-phone-deal-with-jails-lawyer-1.5444598>

[3] White, P. (2020, January 30). *A mom's \$6,000 phone bill in three months: The push to rein in Ontario's costly prison phone system.* The Globe and Mail. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-activists-see-injustice-in-high-cost-of-phone-calls-from-ottawa-area/>

New Social Well-Being Tracker Launches

By Sandra Ngo

Sandra Ngo was Research Coordinator for the Edmonton Social Planning Council from March 2018 until February 2021.

Tracking the Trends (TTT) is the Edmonton Social Planning Council's (ESPC) flagship report. The publication started back in 1989 and follow-up editions are typically updated every other year. Currently, it boasts almost 90 indicators across numerous topics, such as basic demographics, education, employment, income, cost of living, and social health. Since it has been more than 30 years since the first edition was released, it is due for an overhaul in how the report is released.

These publications are a resource where you can get most of your questions answered in one place. Presenting data in a single source permits us to see trends in the context of other social changes occurring simultaneously. For example, when we examine trends using the Consumer Price Index (CPI), average rents, and income growth, the data implies that there has been an erosion of living standards for vulnerable Albertans. However, the way we govern and use data has changed, and data should be easy to understand and accessible to everyone—not just the “gurus.” In a world that seems to grow more complex by the day, community agencies, non-profit organizations, and governments are demanding more data that is regularly collected, accurate, and consistent. Community agencies and the average citizen access data more regularly and readily than ever. Nowadays, having more community input in the types of data that is used is considered best practice.

In light of these changes, which have been accelerated due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ESPC has revamped its *Tracking the Trends* report into an online format called “Social Well-Being Indicators.” The data is now searchable, with quick links so users can hop to the topics they are most interested in. The graphs and charts can be readily exported into other formats and locations, including partner websites. This means that the data that has always been available in *Tracking the Trends* is now easier to access and to use. We have kept all of the analysis and interpretation that we have traditionally done as well.

We've also changed how the data is organized by adopting the Social Determinants of Health Framework. This is a framework used by the Public Health Agency of Canada and places an emphasis upon societal conditions and how they impact our well-being. A social determinants of health approach focuses on how a society organizes and distributes economic and social resources, and directs attention to public policies as a means of improving health. It also requires consideration of political, economic, and social forces that shape policy decisions. Timely, accurate information is indispensable for evidence-based public policy and community service decisions. Changes in social well-being are not linear and are dependent on broader social, economic, and political trends. As such, strategies for positive social change must be rooted in an understanding of the broader historical context of our social environment.

Most Canadian publications present data at the national or provincial level. The indicators presented focus primarily on Edmonton-level data. This makes it a useful tool for people working on social issues in Edmonton and the surrounding region. Unfortunately, data on COVID-19 could not be captured in this latest TTT report, but the effects of the pandemic on Edmontonians will be captured in future updates.

ESPC is excited to share with you the new version of *Tracking the Trends*. We remain committed to regularly updating this valuable compendium of social and economic data that is critical to sound decision-making. We hope our readers will find the digital portal useful in broadening their understanding of social trends in the Edmonton region.

You can access the tracker here: <https://edmontonsocialplanning.ca/social-well-being>

Social Well-Being Tracker

Welcome to our social well-being indicator tracker! This tracker is an adaptation of our bi-annual *Tracking the Trends* publication. Adapting *Tracking the Trends* into an online format allows us to update data as it is released, solidifying it as a source of timely and accurate information focused on our community. This data can assist you to learn about social issues, write reports, design programs, and inform your decision-making.

Our **social well-being indicators** are based on social determinants of health. These indicators are the economic and social conditions that shape the health of individuals and communities. Social determinants of health also determine the extent to which a person possesses the physical, social, and personal resources to identify and achieve personal aspirations, satisfy needs, and cope with the environment. Social determinants of health are about the quantity and quality of a variety of resources that society makes available to its members. Important considerations include both the quality and their distribution amongst the population.

If you would like to learn more about the social determinates of health

Canadian Public Health Association website: <https://www.cpha.ca/what-are-social-determinants-health>

Government of Canada website: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/population-health/what-determines-health.html>

O'Hara, P. (2006). *Social Inclusion Health Indicators: A framework for addressing the social determinants of health*. Edmonton Social Planning Council. https://era.library.ualberta.ca/items/5698b10-06c4-4cef-8bb1-d545acc48d70/view/c46ab661-09c4-4b30-aa6f-99a496f53129/2006_socialinclusion.pdf

Raphael, D., Bryant, T., Mikkonon, J., & Raphael, A. (2020). *Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian facts* (2nd edition). Ontario Tech University Faculty of Health Science and Toronto: York University School of Health Policy and Management. <https://www.thecanadianfacts.org/>

Social Determinants Tools (click to read)

In any community, public policy, social health, and economic well-being are intricately linked. Still, there is disagreement on how these factors influence each other and how to use public policy and social programs to bring about positive change.

Labour force participation and minimum wage tell us something about the percentage of the population that is working, and how much employers are paying for labour. Alberta Works benefit rates reflect the standard of living for those on the economic margins. Some data shows us what it costs to live, such as the Consumer Price Index and average rents. Other data indicate people's capacity to earn an income and maintain a decent standard of living. Low-income data gives an indication of the proportion of the population that live on incomes that are insufficient to cover the costs of living.

The data presented helps to answer the following questions:

- How is Edmonton's population changing?
- Have opportunities to make a living increased?
- How has the cost of living changed?
- Has the cost of living become more affordable?

Indicators (click below)

- < A: Demographics
- < B: Income
- < C: Employment & Labour
- < D: Education and Literacy
- < E: Built Environment
- < F: Social Inclusion
- < G: Health and Health Services

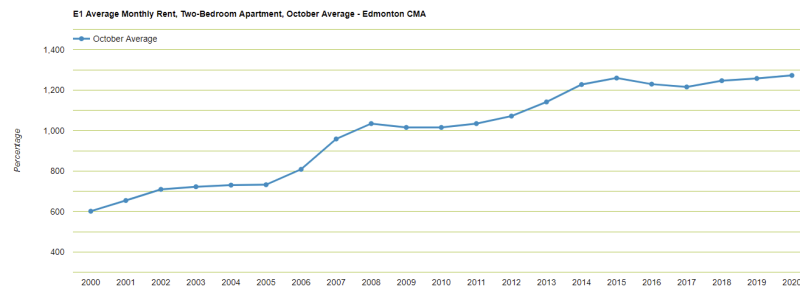
Social Well-Being Tracker

Our **social well-being indicators** are based on social determinants of health. These indicators are the economic and social conditions that shape the health of individuals and communities. Social determinants of health also determine the extent to which a person possesses the physical, social, and personal resources to identify and achieve personal aspirations, satisfy needs, and cope with the environment. Social determinants of health are about the quantity and quality of a variety of resources that a society makes available to its members. Important considerations include both the quality and their distribution amongst the population.

E Built Environment

E1 Average Monthly Rent, Two-Bedroom Apartment, October Average Edmonton CMA

Print Excel Copy Download



Trend Analysis

Short Term



Long Term



Trend Value
Negative

Indicators (click below)

- < A: Demographics
- < B: Income
- < C: Employment & Labour
- < D: Education and Literacy
- < **E: Built Environment**
- < F: Social Inclusion
- < G: Health and Health Services

Built Environment. For almost everyone, housing represents the largest living cost. The availability, affordability, and adequacy of housing is therefore crucial to quality of life for both renters and homeowners.

Renters tend to have lower and more variable incomes and are therefore less able to afford substantial rent increases or the cost of purchasing a home. Vulnerable groups that face barriers, such as recent immigrants, refugees, and Indigenous peoples, often live in crowded or substandard housing.

Home ownership rates are an indicator of the overall level of financial independence in a community. Buying a home requires savings that many low- and moderate-income families do not have. Rising housing costs can make it more difficult to enter the housing market.

Incomes are intricately linked to housing affordability. If incomes do not keep up with the rising cost of housing, people's ability to cover other living costs and to save for their future (education, retirement, etc.) declines.

\$1,272

The average monthly rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Edmonton CMA in October 2020

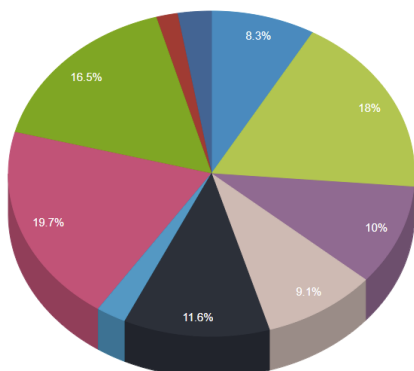
- The cost of rent in Edmonton has increased significantly.
- Rental costs in Edmonton have been increasing.
- The average monthly rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Edmonton CMA in October 2020 was \$1,272.
- Rent tends to decrease slightly during economic downturns, such as the global financial crisis from 2008 to 2010, but increases sharply during economic booms.

C Employment & Labour

C11 Proportion of Employed Persons by Occupation Edmonton CMA

Print CSV Excel Copy Download

C11 Proportion of Employed Persons by Occupation (2020) - Edmonton CMA



- Management
- Business, Finance, Administration
- Natural & Applied Sciences
- Health
- Law and Social, Education, Community
- Arts, Culture, Recreation, Sport
- Sales & Service
- Trades, Transport, Equipment Operation
- Natural Resources, Agriculture
- Manufacturing and Utilities

Trend Analysis

Short Term



Long Term



Trend Value
Neutral

ESPC News and Announcements

Sandra Ngo Leaves the Edmonton Social Planning Council

We were sad to say goodbye to Sandra Ngo, Research Coordinator for the Edmonton Social Planning Council. She served her last day with us on February 5, 2021 after nearly three years of service to accept a position as a Policy Analyst for the Government of Alberta.

Sandra Ngo first joined ESPC in March 2018. Prior to joining our agency, she was the Community Resource Coordinator with the University of Alberta's Faculty of Extension where she designed, implemented, and evaluated a program to alleviate food insecurity and hunger for immigrant and refugee families.

Her passion for food security, social justice, and data-driven solutions was infectious and came through in spades in all of her contributions, which included, but was not limited to, research reports, publications, presentations, and collaborations with numerous partner agencies.

Those who had the pleasure of working with her know she has a strong reputation for kindness, generosity, and invaluable mentorship. We wish her all the best in her new role and we are confident she will continue to make positive contributions to pressing social policy issues.

Blog Post Series: Addressing Systemic Racism in Canada

In an effort to build on conversations around systemic racism—whether here in Edmonton, within Alberta, within Canada, and globally as a whole—ESPC took the plunge into examining how systemic racism has permeated various aspects of Canadian society and has outlined steps we can take to bring about a more just and equitable society.

While ESPC does have a lengthy history in working with community partners to address racism and work towards a more inclusive Edmonton, it is important to acknowledge that there is still more work to be done. And so we commit to re-doubling our efforts.

On our website's blog section, staff put out a six-part series on confronting racism in Canada, which took on a number of interrelated issues including the history of Indigenous and Black movements in Canada, systemic racism in education, law enforcement, and justice, and the role of disaggregated race-based data.

Racism can take on various forms, whether it be explicit (e.g., human rights violations, or the *Indian Act* legislation)

or implicit (e.g., colour-blindness, lack of diversity and representation in decision-making). In order to make any progress, we must be able to identify the problem and listen to the voices of those with lived experience who are most affected by systemic racism.

In addition to a rigorous and nuanced policy analysis of these various pressure points, these blog posts offer reading lists and resources that allow the reader to take a deep dive into these issues.

You can read the posts in their entirety here: <https://edmontonsocialplanning.ca/category/blog-racism/>

Annual General Meeting—RSVP

The Edmonton Social Planning Council's 81st Annual General Meeting will be held virtually this year.

When: Thursday, May 27, 2021 from 5:30 to 7:30 PM

More information to come as the date draws near! Please check our website or subscribe to our weekly eBlast to keep up to date.

Nominations Open for Award of Merit

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 our vision of a just and inclusive community. 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.

Nominations will be received until **Sunday, April 25th, 2021** for consideration by the committee. The Award of Merit for Advocacy of Social Justice is presented at the ESPC Annual General Meeting each year. This year, the meeting will be held virtually on May 27th, 2021. To see full criteria and download the nomination form, please [check our website](#).

Rowan El-Bialy joins ESPC as new Research Coordinator

In April 2021, the Edmonton Social Planning Council welcomed Rowan El-Bialy (she/her) as our new Research Coordinator, taking over duties for the role from her predecessor, Sandra Ngo.

Rowan is a researcher who has studied the social determinants of wellness for various marginalized groups, including newcomers, seniors, people of colour, youth, and low-income workers. She has a particular interest in communicating knowledge for greater civic engagement and social equity. Rowan obtained her MSc in Community Health and Humanities from Memorial University, where she developed a keen love of hiking and the outdoors. She spends weekends exploring Edmonton's river valley with her partner, Bailey, and their rescue dog, Dorothy.

She will make a great addition to our team. Please join us in giving a warm welcome to Rowan!



Lunch and Learn Events Support Lively Community Conversations

The COVID-19 pandemic upended our ability to safely hold public gatherings, especially our Lunch and Learn events, which were typically hosted in the downtown branch of the Edmonton Public Library. Since March 2020, our shift to an online format has allowed our Lunch and Learn sessions to flourish.

We've had the opportunity to host community members, advocates, and partner agencies to have engaging sessions and lively conversations on topics like food security, basic income, housing and homelessness, child poverty, and many others.

We're also pleased to open up our Lunch and Learn sessions to other non-profits as a way of introducing agencies and their incredible programs and services to other community members.

For those interested in participating, we would love to host you at a future event. Please direct any inquiries to Brett Lambert at brettl@edmontonsocialplanning.ca

Concordia University Practicum Student Reflects on Her Placement with ESPC

By Aastha Tripathi

Note: from September 2020 to April 2021, Aastha Tripathi, from Concordia University of Edmonton, took part in a student practicum placement with the Edmonton Social Planning Council. As she finishes her work with us, she reflects on her experience below.

Based on my aptitude and interests, I was placed at the Edmonton Social Planning Council by the Concordia University of Edmonton's Psychology (Applied Emphasis) program coordinator. My experience working in student government and education in psychology sparked my interest in mental health advocacy, and my experience working with the agency was remarkable.

Throughout this past year, I have witnessed community agencies' undeniable value and the role they play in sparking policy change. I learned this while working on the Alberta child poverty report titled *Spotlight: Lessons on Child Poverty During a Pandemic*. I had the opportunity to collaborate and network with other agencies and partners such as Public Interest Alberta, the Alberta College of Social Workers, and post-graduate students in public health programs. Together we explored topics ranging from homelessness to early childhood education and the impacts our provincial policies have on Albertans' everyday lives. I received the invaluable opportunity to interview and observe social support organizations such as the Islamic Family & Social Services Association. I learned of the severe impacts of limited social support from researchers at the University of Alberta. Ultimately, we were able to release our report to the media and bring it forward to our government as a means to serve the community.

In the placement, I aimed to explore topics surrounding Albertans' mental health and wellness, and ESPC gave me a platform to explore these critical issues. I wrote about restorative justice issues concerning youth offenders and learned about the dire need for community involvement in rehabilitating youth back into society using traditional Indigenous practices. I researched the prevalence of loneliness during the pandemic and its effects on Albertans. I found where help is always available and accessible to Canadians. I also had the opportunity to explore feminist

issues such as the impact of COVID-19 on women in the workforce, and was saddened by our society's harsh realities. I studied research about decriminalizing race and learned that while decarceration is more crucial than ever, the need to invest in social support is even more dire. I also reviewed social initiatives such as Bell Talk Day and its real impacts on Canadian mental health, which can be found in this very issue of *the fACTivist*. Finally, I examined senior citizens' needs today in comparison to their needs a generation ago.

Through these pieces, I learned the profound impact that an independent, non-profit, and non-partisan social research organization can have on its community. I acquired the knowledge on how to monitor social issues and trends and provide an informed perspective based on accurate information. Overall, I have learned profound lessons about the critical components of advocacy, policy change, policy impact, and most importantly, how to communicate these ideas in a neat, coherent, and accessible manner. I know I will carry these lessons forward as I forge my career and utilize these skills to serve my community further.

My departure from the Edmonton Social Planning Council is bittersweet. I am relieved to have almost completed my bachelor's degree, and have learned how to work effectively within a talented and dedicated multi-disciplinary team, to balance ethics in a social work setting, and about confidentiality and teamwork. Under their guidance, I learned how to analyze data accurately and produce precise reports while working collaboratively with other social agencies. I thoroughly researched social policies that supported other organizations' work and contributed to a piece that aimed to educate the public regarding social issues that impact Albertans. My experiences would not have been half as enriching without the unconditional support and patience of the team, and for that, I will always be grateful.

About the Edmonton Social Planning Council

About the Edmonton Social Planning Council

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.

2020-2021 Board of Directors

Dave Trautman—President

Peter Schalk—Treasurer

Jalene Anderson-Baron

Charlotte Bennie

Danielle Dolgoy

Bill Howe

Paula Kirman

Nicole Smith

Katherine Weaver

Vanessa Zembal

Staff Members

Susan Morrissey, Executive Director

Justine Basilan, Executive Assistant

Brett Lambert, Community Engagement Coordinator

Sandra Ngo, Research Coordinator (until February 2021)

Rowan El-Bialy, Strategic Research Coordinator

Jenn Rossiter, Research Services and Capacity Building Coordinator

Sydney Sheloff, Research Officer





THE FACTIVIST

APRIL 2021

