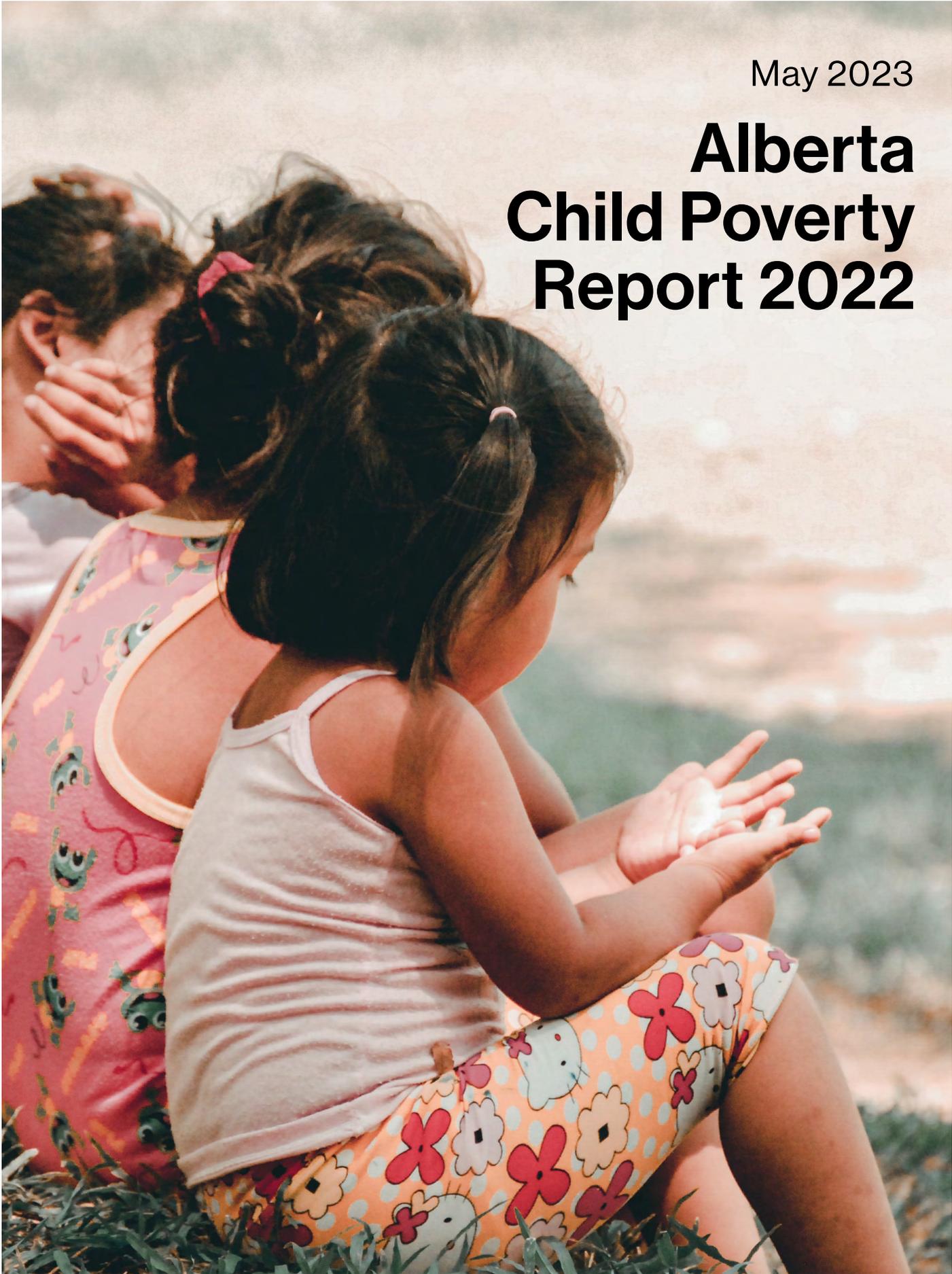


May 2023

Alberta Child Poverty Report 2022



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Introduction

All children deserve access to the conditions they need in order to thrive mentally, physically, and socially. However, in 2020, more than 130,000 children in Alberta lived in poverty.¹ That is 130,000 children whose needs are not being met, who must experience the pain of hunger, limited access to education and educational resources, lack of weather-appropriate clothing, inadequate housing, and social and economic barriers—all of which have lasting impacts on quality of life.

In 1989, the House of Commons resolved to end child poverty by the year 2000.² It is now 23 years past this due date, and child poverty continues to be a persistent problem. We have the means to end child poverty, allowing it to persist over decades is a choice. It's a choice by decision-makers who have not prioritized the eradication of child poverty.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Canada instated a suite of income security measures to protect families from falling into poverty, including the creation of temporary benefits and tops-ups to existing benefits. This led to a steep decline in child poverty rates - 30,000 less children experienced poverty in 2020 than in 2019.¹ However, as pandemic benefits run out, child poverty rates are bound to increase again. The government has proven it has the means to significantly reduce child poverty - this momentum cannot end with the pandemic.

Past Alberta Child Poverty Reports have explored that children in poverty experience significant challenges, including poor health outcomes, learning disabilities, academic underachievement, low literacy rates, a decreased likelihood of completing high school and post-secondary education, and poorer incomes as working adults. Stressors related to poverty include, but are not limited to, food insecurity, unemployment,

poor education, unsafe living conditions, lack of access to medical services, mental health and well-being, and material hardships. There are broader social benefits to ensuring that these disadvantages are addressed, so that children can grow up to become healthy adults. Preventing adverse childhood outcomes saves public dollars and can break intergenerational cycles of abuse and poverty.

The federal government released Canada's first ever poverty reduction strategy in 2018, built on the pillars of "living in dignity; providing opportunity and inclusion; and enhancing resilience and security."³ However, Alberta does not have a poverty reduction strategy of its own.

This is a missed opportunity to coordinate efforts between governments on child care initiatives, income supports, health care, and education. The provincial government has a long way to go to become a province where all citizens—especially children—can live in dignity.

The Alberta Child Poverty Report is an annual report produced by the Edmonton Social Planning Council and Public Interest Alberta. It is designed to inform policy-makers, advocates, and decision-makers in their work to end child poverty and create an equitable Alberta for all. This year's report explores some of the current issues faced by children living in poverty, addressing household employment and access to basic needs. The authors explore topics such as: measuring child poverty, lifting children out of poverty, poverty within Indigenous and racialized communities, the state of child care, housing, food insecurity, and taxation and income redistribution. It concludes with recommendations in all these domains that will contribute towards reducing and ending child poverty.

A young boy with a backpack is seen from behind, looking at a red car on a city street. The street is lined with trees and buildings. The title 'Child Poverty Rates' is overlaid in large white text on the left side of the image.

Child Poverty Rates

How Do We Measure Poverty?

There are multiple methodologies to measure poverty, each having different utility in different contexts. The Market Basket Measure (MBM) is Canada's official poverty measure.

It determines poverty thresholds based on the regional cost of a basket of food, clothing, shelter, transportation, and other necessities meant to represent a modest standard of living. Families with a disposable income lower than the threshold (i.e. families that cannot afford these basket items) are considered to be in poverty.⁴ The Census Family Low Income Measure, based on after-tax income (CFLIM-AT) is a relative measure of poverty - it is calculated as 50% of the median income in Canada, adjusted by family size.⁵ The Low Income Measure After Tax (LIM-AT) is also calculated as 50% of the median after-tax income in Canada, but is based on household income rather than family income.⁶ A "family" refers to a married or common law couple or a lone-parent with a child under the age of 25 who live in the same dwelling whereas a "household" refers to people who are living in the same dwelling, regardless of if they are family or not.



Despite being Canada's official poverty measure, the MBM has several limitations. First, the MBM uses data from the Canadian Income Survey, and due to small sample sizes, it is not as reliable when analyzing smaller geographies. The CFLIM-AT uses taxfiler data and is therefore more reliable in the Edmonton context, and is more comparable to other data from Statistics Canada.⁵ Second, while the MBM purports to show a modest standard of living, critics argue that the basket may not reflect the full realities of people living in poverty and as such underestimates rates of poverty.⁷ The CFLIM-AT has a higher threshold for poverty, and reports a higher prevalence of poverty (see figure 1). Third, the MBM currently only publishes data for a family of four, whereas the CFLIM-AT can be used to examine the poverty rates of several different family types. For these reasons, the Alberta Child Poverty Report uses the CFLIM-AT to measure overall rates of poverty. The Alberta Child Poverty Report will also use the LIM-AT when describing poverty rates by demographics, as this is the measure used in the census.

Timely, high quality data is necessary for understanding the scope of child poverty in Alberta. However, high quality data takes time to collect and analyze. Both taxfiler and census data used in this report are based on the year 2020, the most up-to-date data available.

Poverty Rates

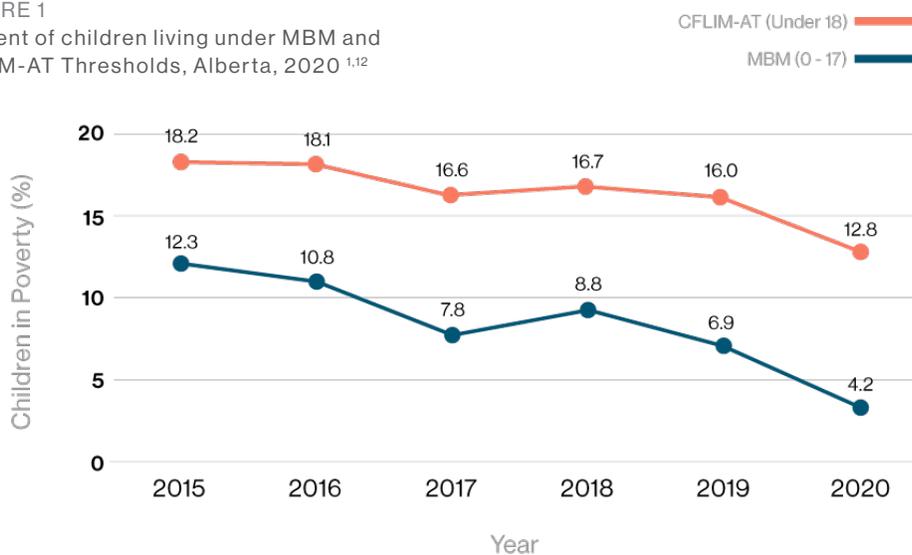
In 2020, 12.8% of children were living in poverty according to the CFLIM-AT, that is 130,640 children whose basic needs are not being met.¹

As depicted in figure 1, poverty rates dropped significantly between 2019 and 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic was declared on March 11, 2020. Shortly thereafter, many folks lost their jobs as a result of public health restrictions and shutdowns – 11.4% of Albertans experienced unemployment in 2020, up from 7% in 2019.⁸ However, quickly created COVID-19 benefits, such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), and top-ups to existing benefits, including the Canada Child Benefit, ensured that these individuals and their families would not fall into poverty. Roughly two-thirds of Canadians received pandemic-related benefits.⁹ If COVID-related benefits were not created, 19.8% of children would have experienced poverty in 2020 (see figure 4).¹⁰

This drop in poverty is likely temporary, once pandemic-related benefits and top-ups run out, families who received these will lose a large chunk of income.

Since CERB was considered taxable income, families who had received it are now experiencing clawbacks on the benefits and supports they rely on, most notably the Canada Child Benefit.¹¹ As a result, families may be pushed back into poverty. Due to lags in data releases, the harsh effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on families lives won't be seen for a couple years.

FIGURE 1
Percent of children living under MBM and CFLIM-AT Thresholds, Alberta, 2020^{1,12}



Poverty rates vary considerably by family type, 38.8% of Albertan children in lone parent families lived in poverty in 2020, compared to 5.9% of children in couple families.¹ 76% of lone parent families were headed by women.¹³

The poverty gap describes the difference between the poverty line threshold and the median after-tax income of all low-income families living below that threshold. Most low-income families live well below the poverty line. Lone parents experience the largest poverty gap—in 2020, lone parents with one child had an average income that was \$13,038 below the poverty line.^{14,15}

FIGURE 2
Percent of children living under the CFLIM-AT Thresholds, by family type, Alberta, 2020

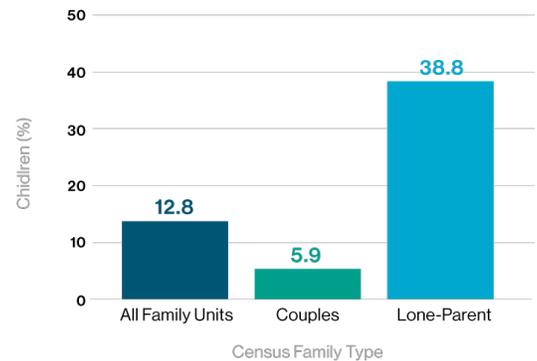
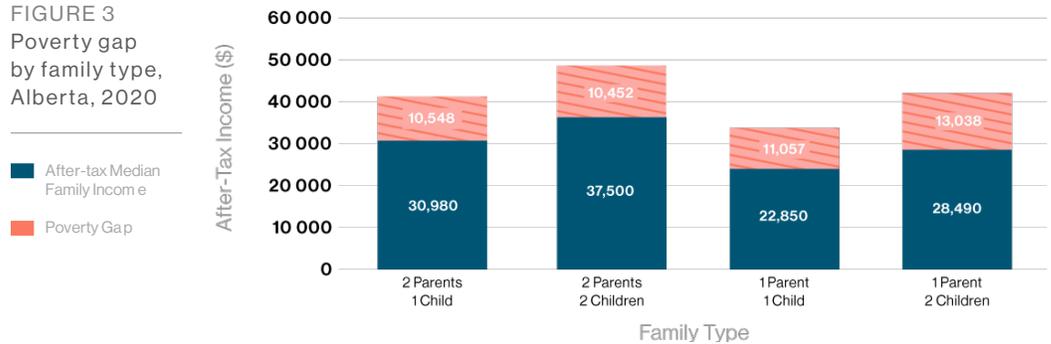


FIGURE 3
Poverty gap by family type, Alberta, 2020

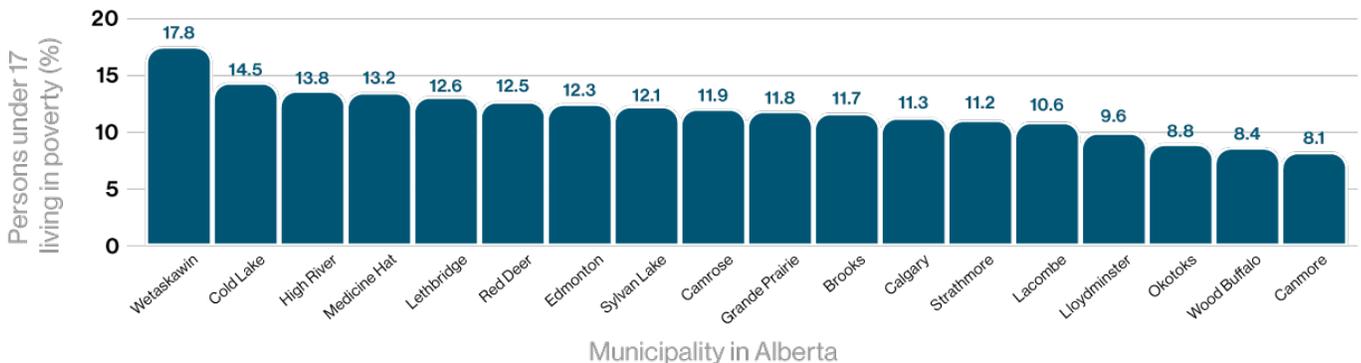


Differences by Municipality

Poverty rates vary considerably by location. Rural areas in Alberta, especially those that are geographically isolated, tend to have fewer job opportunities, access to education and career development, and access to social services, which both leaves families vulnerable to poverty and does not provide them with the opportunities needed to alleviate that poverty.

Canmore experienced the lowest child poverty rate, at 8.1%, whereas the poverty rate in Wetaskiwin was over double – 17.8%.¹

FIGURE 4
Percent of children living under the CFLIM-AT threshold, by municipality, Alberta, 2020.¹



Lifting Children out of Poverty

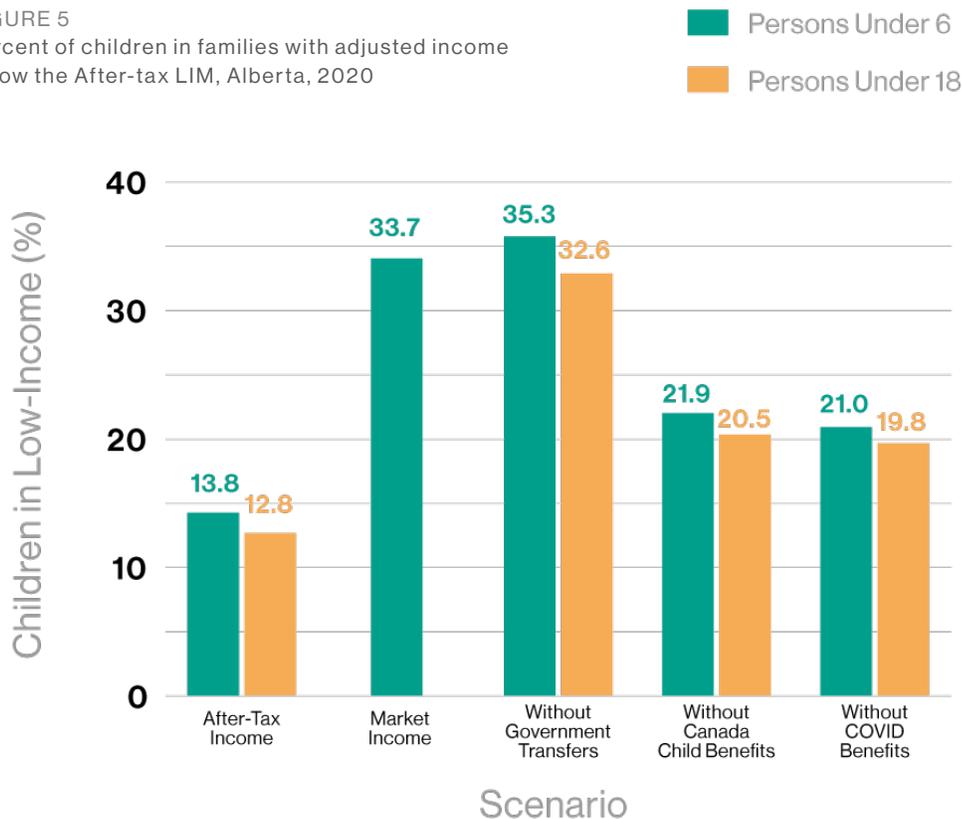
Child Benefits

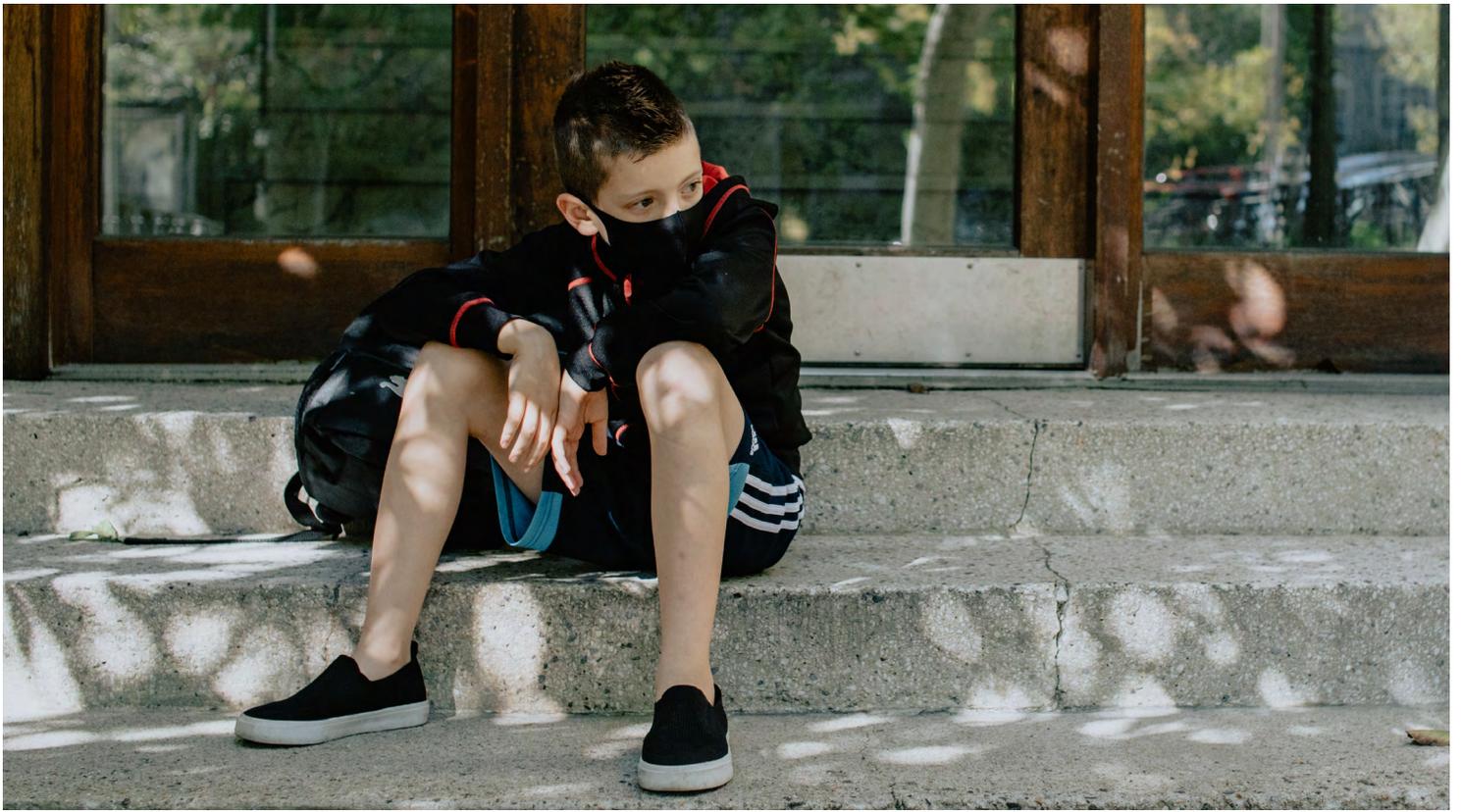
Government income transfers are an essential tool used to lift children and youth aged 0 to 17 years out of poverty.

The Canada Child Benefit, along with the Alberta Child and Family Benefit, are paid directly to eligible families with children under the age of 18. Families also have access to benefits available to all Canadians, such as the GST/HST credit. Payments are based on the incomes of families, with lower income families receiving higher benefits.

Under Canada's current benefit arrangement, 13.8% of children under the age of 6 and 12.8% of children under the age of 18 are living in poverty (see figure 4). Without government benefits those rates jump to 35.3% and 32.6%, respectively.¹⁰ The statistics show that government income transfers have greatly reduced child poverty, however, there is still much more work to be done. 12.8% is still too many children to be experiencing poverty.

FIGURE 5
Percent of children in families with adjusted income below the After-tax LIM, Alberta, 2020





The impact of government transfers is subject to change as different governments come into power and re-work benefit systems. In the first half of 2020, families received provincial child benefits through the Alberta Child Benefit and the Alberta Family Employment Tax Credit. These two programs were consolidated in July 2020, and re-worked into a new program, the Alberta Child and Family Benefit (ACFB).

Analysis has shown that while the ACFB will provide increased benefits to very low-income Albertans, most families—including those living in poverty— will see a decrease in support.¹⁶

It is difficult to determine the full extent to which this change in benefit program has affected child poverty, as its effects are entangled with the COVID-19 pandemic and associated economic consequences.

Benefits introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic have proven that governments can significantly reduce poverty when they invest in the social safety net. Without these benefits, 21.0% of children under 6 and 19.8% of children under 19 would have experienced poverty in 2020.¹⁰ However, these benefits were designed to be temporary, and as they end any progress made in reducing child poverty will be rolled back. The pandemic has proven that governments have the ability to protect families and move them out of poverty. This momentum cannot end, Albertans need long-term improvements to benefit systems.

Parental Wages

Aside from improved child benefit programs, increased parental wages can also reduce child poverty rates. Children cannot work, and as such are reliant on their parent's incomes to meet their needs. All parents, regardless of their job, should be paid a living wage.

A living wage is defined as the hourly wage that a worker needs to provide for themselves, their families, and reach basic financial security. "It is the hourly rate at which a household can meet a modest standard of living, once government transfers have been added to the family's income and deductions have been subtracted."¹⁷ This modest standard of living includes basic needs such as shelter, transportation, food, and clothing, but also allows for one adult to attend school, extended health and dental plans, and a minor emergency contingency fund.¹⁷

The living wage is the weighted average of the income needs of three different family types - a two-parent family with two young children, a lone parent with one young child, and a single adult living alone.¹⁷

Living wages vary across the province and change depending on available government benefits and the cost of basic needs. The Alberta Living Wage Network has calculated that the living wage ranges from \$17.50 in Medicine Hat to \$32.75 in Canmore.¹⁸

Ensuring that parents are paid a living wage will improve children's well-being as they grow up.





FIGURE 6
Living Wage by Municipality, 2022



Racialized Children Living in Poverty

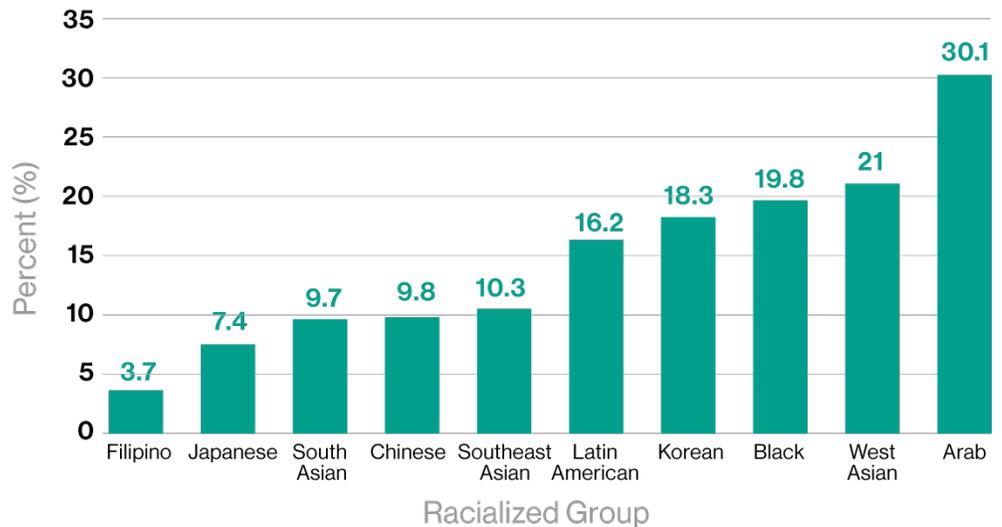
High poverty rates in racialized communities are a direct result of racism deeply embedded in all systems racialized folks deal with in Canada, which structure opportunities in a way that disadvantages them.

For example, in education, racialized children experience microaggressions, low expectations from teachers stemming from prejudiced assumptions, inequitable punishments, race-based bullying, and a downplaying of these issues of racism by school administrators.¹⁹ This all makes it hard for racialized children to do well in school, which impacts future employment opportunities. Once in the employment world, they face even more barriers. For example, racialized folks tend to experience pay inequity, for every dollar a white man makes, racialized men make 78 cents and racialized women make 59 cents.²⁰

As of 2020, 13.1% (LIM-AT) of racialized children (aged 0-14) are currently experiencing poverty, compared to 10.7% of non-racialized children. Experiences vary significantly within different racialized groups. Filipino children living in Alberta have the lowest poverty rate at 3.7%, whereas Arab children experience a poverty rate over double the average at 30.1%.²¹

A note on terminology: Statistics Canada uses the term “visible minority” to refer to “persons, other than Indigenous, who are non-caucasian in race or non-white in colour”.²¹ This is the same terminology used in the Employment Equity Act. Conversations with community have revealed that many folks find the term ‘visible minority’ does not accurately reflect their experience, and some find it offensive. As such, the Alberta Child Poverty Report uses the term ‘racialized’ instead.

FIGURE 7
Percent of children living under the LIM-AT threshold, by racialized group, Alberta, 2021



Racialized newcomer and immigrant families face unique oppression and barriers within Canada. Newcomers and immigrants may experience discrimination because of their accent, skin colour, and cultural differences, which affects their sense of belonging and social integration in Canada.²² They also face economic barriers. For example, many immigrants experience overqualification, the credentials they earned in their countries of origins are often not recognized here, and thus they end up working in low paying positions that do not meet their education or skill level.²³

The children of immigrants (43%) are more likely to get a university education than children whose parents were born in Canada (29%), and tend to have better employment outcomes than their parents.²⁴

Children tend to fare better the more generations their families have lived in Canada. First generation immigrant children – children who immigrated here – experience a poverty rate of 19.9%, whereas third generation children – children who were born in Canada and both parents were also born in Canada – experience a poverty rate of 10.5%. Again, these experiences are not monolithic. First generation Arab immigrants, for example, experienced a poverty rate of 43.0% whereas third generation only experienced a rate of 9.9%. Filipinos experienced the reverse of this trend – 3.7% of first generation Filipino immigrants experienced poverty compared to 5.5% of third generation.²¹

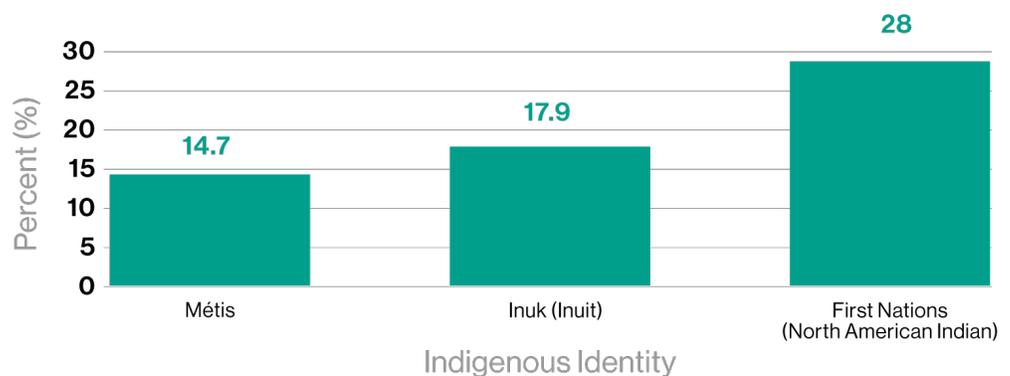
A photograph of three children walking away from the camera on a beach. The child on the left is wearing a pink tank top with a cartoon pattern and light-colored shorts. The child in the middle is wearing a light pink tank top and orange shorts with a Hello Kitty pattern. The child on the right is wearing a light pink t-shirt and denim overalls. They are holding hands and walking on a sandy beach with the ocean in the background.

Indigenous Children Living in Poverty

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children are subject to systemic discrimination, intergenerational poverty, and ongoing trauma.

This can be traced back to colonial policies such as the Indian Residential School system and Sixties Scoop which sought to separate Indigenous peoples from their land, culture and community, along with ongoing discriminatory practices. To this day, Indigenous children encounter barriers in accessing education, child care, and health care that is culturally safe and trauma informed, and adequate housing.²⁵

FIGURE 8
Percent of children living under the LIM-AT threshold,
by Indigenous identity, Alberta, 2021



Indigenous children face higher rates of poverty than non-Indigenous children. Overall, 22.3% of Indigenous children experience poverty, compared to 10.0% of non-Indigenous children. Within this group, First Nations experience the highest poverty rate at 28%, and Métis the lowest at 14.7%. When it comes to registered First Nations children living on reserve, the rate jumps to 35.8%.²⁶

Given that Indigenous children's challenges today are a direct result of dissolution of traditional forms of government and forced cultural disconnection,²⁵ it is in reclaiming these things that solutions will be found.

Research has shown that communities that are self-governed tend to do better on a number of social and economic indicators - they have lower suicide rates, better economic outcomes, and more effective social services and programs.²⁷ Children who are connected to and feel pride in their cultures have higher self-esteem, are more resilient, and more likely to feel mastery.²⁷



Child Care

Early learning and child care policies, funding, and programs are essential to addressing child poverty.

For decades, advocates from across Canada have made the case that a healthy Canadian society is, in large part, founded on how we address unpaid labour, the caring economy, and early learning and care. As a result, the federal government made early learning and child care a priority in its 2021 budget, earmarking about \$27 billion over five years for partnerships with the provinces and territories.²⁸

From a rights based perspective, access to high quality early learning and child care is essential. Early learning and child care investments are proven to alleviate poverty and to reduce health inequity, both in the short and long-term.²⁹ However, Canada still has a long way to go in recognizing those rights through the implementation of a sustainable and equitable system of early learning and care. Not only does early learning and child care need to be affordable, but it needs to be accessible to all, high quality, culturally appropriate, inclusive, and sustainable.

Market-based logics have created a child care system in which over 60% of Alberta's operators are for-profit.³⁰ This means that quality of care, workforce development, curriculum, equipment, facilities, and other investments are often not adequately invested in, in favour of maintaining or increasing profit. Rather, advocates for universal access to early learning and child care share a long-term vision of a Canada where the rights of the child and young family come first.

When the federal government announced nearly \$30 billion for early learning and child care in Budget 2021, it compared its vision for child care to Canada's public education system. "Just as public school provides children with quality education in their neighbourhoods, the government's goal is to ensure that all families have access to high-quality, affordable and flexible early learning and child care no matter where they live."²⁸

Canada has long recognized that "access to high quality child care is a children's right, a women's right, and a human right, as defined by various United Nations agreements and thus part of Canada's [and the provinces'] human rights obligations."²⁹ A systemic approach is necessary to live up to this commitment, and patchwork interventions will not lead to the system that children and parents are entitled to. Subsidies that address immediate affordability concerns are a short-term intervention that will not result in the long-term, sustainable system building necessary to address systemic and intergenerational poverty or barriers to meaningful participation in the community at different life stages.

High quality early learning and child care create pathways out of systemic and intergenerational poverty.

Early Learning and Child Care is essential to any plan to address, reduce and eliminate child poverty "because it provides benefits both to the children through quality programs and to their parents by allowing them to continue participating in the labour force while their children are properly cared for."³¹

Unfortunately, too many children and families still lack access to high quality early learning and child care, especially in rural and remote areas, even after the framework agreement signed between the Government of Canada and the Government of Alberta. The child care coverage rate in Alberta, while improving, is still not where it needs to be, and this rate does not assess the quality of the space. According to research from the spring of 2022, even with the general increases in coverage across the province and across age groups "full day coverage remained under 30% in 6 of the 10 largest cities in Alberta," including Edmonton and Calgary.³²

The risk to a truly affordable, accessible and high-quality system

Despite decades of evidence showing public and non-profit early learning and child care to be the most efficient and effective way to build a comprehensive system, the Alberta government recently announced its new plan to promote for-profit expansion by creating new definitions of “core” and “enhanced” child care.³³

This new system is a threat to much of the progress that has been made relative to accessibility, quality and, ultimately, affordability in Alberta because, in the long-term, it will cement the segmentation of child care programs and create a two-tiered system.

This new approach in Alberta provides for-profit centers with the ability to charge parents for “enhancements,” and could very well put other non-profit options at risk. While there is no clear definition of “enhancements,”³³ it is worrisome that the current framework agreement and new cost control framework continues to promote market based logics and the expansion of profit in the early learning and child care sector.

While the Canada-Alberta agreement was generally deemed successful in reducing average parental fees by 50% by 2023, recent research from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives suggests that Alberta is at risk of not meeting its long-term targets under the bilateral agreement due to overly complex administration and for-profit expansion.³⁴

Because Alberta took a unique Albertan approach to addressing affordability, which combined an initial flat rate fee reduction with changes to its subsidy system with respect to eligibility thresholds, low income families did not see the same benefit as those in other provinces. Whereas middle-income families have benefited from dramatically increased eligibility for the fee subsidy, the overall fee subsidy has been reduced, and therefore, eligible low-income families will have less of their fees paid by the province.³⁴ As a result, the immediate long-term and immediate benefits of addressing child poverty vis a vis early learning and child care will have been diminished by this policy choice.

In order for Alberta to remain on track with its goals of reducing fees to an average of \$10 per day while providing quality, accessible, and inclusive services, it must focus on building a system where quality and evidence trump profit and ideology.

The best way to effectively and sustainably address child and family poverty through early learning and child care is to ensure decision makers follow the best evidence and models available as Alberta builds its system.





Housing

Adequate housing is more than just living in a structure with four walls and a roof.

According to the United Nations, there are seven criteria that must be met in order for housing to be considered adequate:

- 1. Security of tenure, which guarantees legal protection against forced eviction or harassment**
- 2. Availability of services, such as safe drinking water, food storage, heat, adequate sanitation**
- 3. Affordability, where shelter costs do not exceed 25% of household income**
- 4. Habitability, which offers protection from the elements**
- 5. Accessibility, which meets the needs of marginalized groups**
- 6. Location, which offers accessibility to employment opportunities, health care, schools, and other amenities**
- 7. Cultural adequacy, which takes into account the expression of cultural adequacy.³⁵**

For children specifically, the quality of housing they live in heavily influences their educational advancement and overall well-being. A lack of adequate housing negatively impacts the growth and development of children and inhibits their human rights, including the right to education, health, and personal security. If they become homeless, children can be vulnerable to a range of emotional problems, including anxiety, sleeplessness, aggression, and withdrawal.³⁵

Canada is facing a housing crisis, with a shortage in affordable housing contributing to rising homelessness across Canada. National estimates suggest more than 235,000 people experience homelessness in a given year (numbers for children experiencing homelessness can be imprecise, but 20% of the Canadian homeless population—up to 40,000 people—are youth between the ages of 13 and 24), but ongoing research suggests overall homelessness numbers could be three times higher.^{36,37} Within Alberta, the 2018 Point in Time (PiT) Homeless Count found that 5,735 people were experiencing homelessness within the province. 11% of them were under the age of 18 while 8% were young adults aged 18 to 24 years old.³⁸ Numbers from the 2022 PiT Homeless Count are forthcoming, but we do know that homelessness has dramatically increased in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Within Edmonton alone, 2,769 people are experiencing homelessness as of December 2022, which is about double Edmonton's count prior to the beginning of COVID.³⁹

While home ownership is feeling increasingly out of reach for many Canadians⁴⁰, the cost of renting is increasingly unaffordable too. The average rent prices in October 2022 was \$1,976 across all types of properties, an increase of 11.9% on the national level.⁴¹

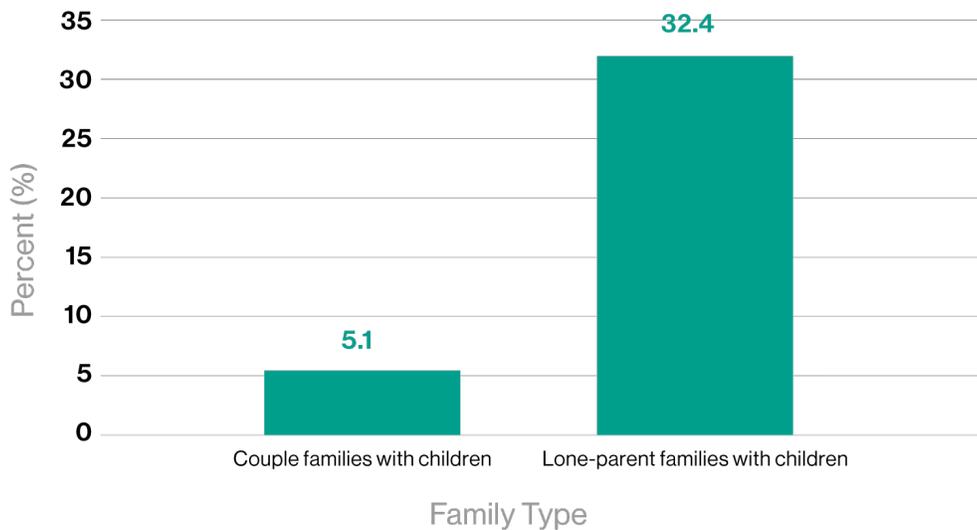
According to the City of Edmonton's 2022 Affordable Housing Needs Assessment, that average rental price would be completely unaffordable for any household whose annual incomes are below \$70,000.⁴²

Within Alberta, rental prices grew by 13.2%, slightly above the national average, this puts an immense amount of pressure on renters struggling to get by.⁴¹

Renters from various walks of life throughout Alberta are acutely feeling the anxiety. Tough market conditions in Calgary and elsewhere are resulting in renters feeling pressured to pay excessive fees or deposits in order to secure a home or risk going without one.⁴³ In more extreme cases, some are pressured to put down three months worth of rent before even being considered for an apartment. This situation is particularly untenable for youth, people experiencing homelessness, newcomers, and people on a fixed income.⁴⁴ Within Edmonton, one in four households pay more rent than they can afford or live in crowded and unsafe conditions. One third of these renters are Indigenous and half are female led.⁴¹

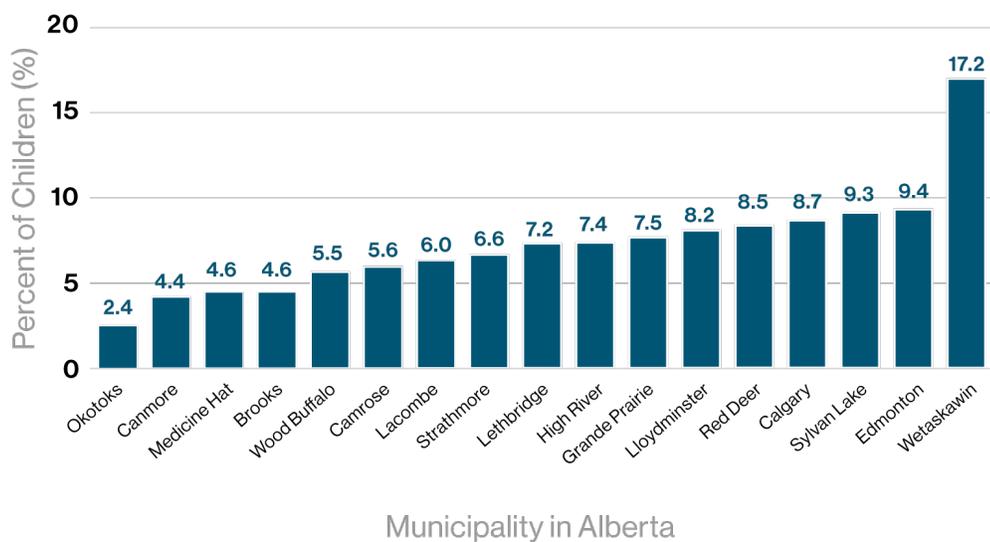
Housing, continued.

FIGURE 9
Percent of children living in core housing need, Alberta, 2021



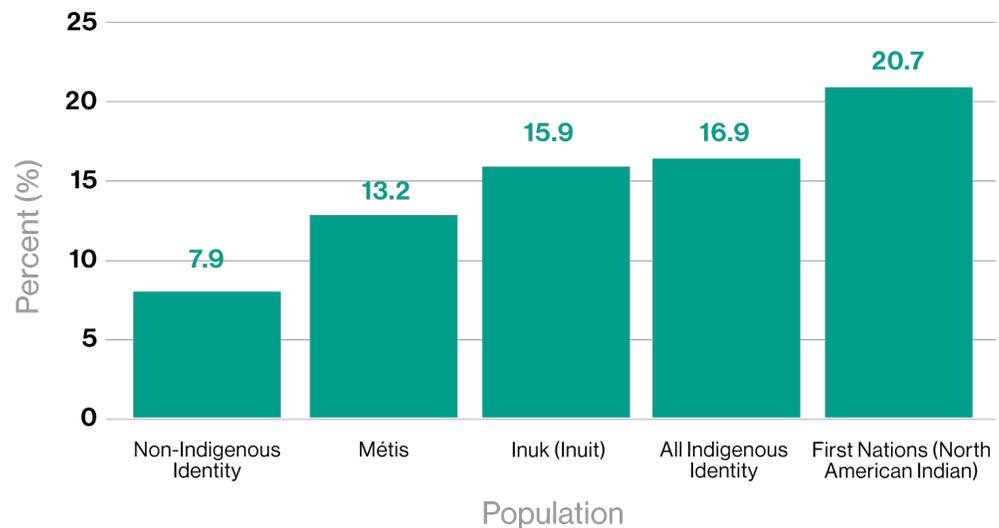
More children are living in core housing need. A household lives in core housing need when their housing situation falls below at least one threshold for housing adequacy (not requiring major repairs), affordability (spending no more than 30% of household annual income), or suitability (enough bedrooms for the size and composition of the household).⁴⁶ According to the 2021 Census of Canada, children in homes led by single-parents are more likely to live in core housing need. While 5.1% of children living in couple households in Alberta live in core housing need, 32.5% of children in lone-parent households in Alberta live in core housing need (see figure 9).⁴⁵

FIGURE 10
Percent of children in core housing need, by Municipality, Alberta, 2021



The prevalence of children living in core housing need varies quite a bit throughout Alberta, with the highest concentration being seen in Wetaskiwin (17.2%) followed by Edmonton (9.4%), Sylvan Lake (9.3%), and Calgary (8.7%). The lowest concentration of children living in core housing need can be found in Okotoks (2.4%), Canmore (4.4%), and Medicine Hat (4.6%) (see figure 10).⁴⁵

FIGURE 11
Percent of children living in core housing need, by Indigenous identity, Alberta, 2021



Indigenous children in Alberta are also disproportionately more likely to be in core housing need. Among non-Indigenous children, 7.9% of them live in core housing need compared to 13.2% of Métis, 15.9% of Inuit, and 20.7% of First Nations children (see figure 11).⁴⁵

The status quo of our housing situation is leaving many households – especially those with children – struggling. An over-reliance on the private housing market does not adequately meet the needs of a diverse population. The financialization of housing – treating housing as a commodity prioritizing wealth and investment at the expense of housing being a human right and social good – places significant barriers for low-income renters in accessing affordable and habitable housing.⁴⁷ Within Edmonton, financialization has significantly been on the rise within a relatively short time frame. In 2021, an estimated 49.6% of renters lived in primary rental housing (e.g. purpose-built rentals like apartments or row houses) and 22.2% of those renters lived in housing that was institutionally owned by a Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT), an increase of nearly 15 percentage points from 2006 when the rate was 7.6%.⁴⁸ The rise of REITs involved with rental housing has been associated with rising rent levels, impacts on tenant quality of life, higher rates of eviction, and gentrification.⁴⁹

Housing is a human right and should be treated as such.

As REITs expand and rents rise, more and more families will be pushed into unaffordable, inadequate, and unsuitable housing. The landscape of housing needs to be reimaged, so all Albertans can have housing. In addition, expanding support for social and affordable housing and other innovative housing solutions that prioritize the well-being of marginalized communities is necessary in order to ensure a more inclusive and just society.



Food Insecurity

Food insecurity occurs when individuals or families lack access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food due to financial, physical, or social barriers.

Experiencing food insecurity can be detrimental for a person and community's well-being. According to the non-profit Community Food Centres Canada, food insecurity affects physical and mental health, relationships with loved ones and children, while also being attributed to increased social isolation, barriers in finding and maintaining employment, difficulty finding meaning and purpose in life, and impediments in the expression and sharing of culture.⁵⁰ For children specifically, food insecurity can bring about nutritional deficiencies, lower educational outcomes, and an increase in childhood obesity.⁵¹

In a province as wealthy as Alberta, the prevalence of food insecurity is inexcusable. In fact, Alberta is seeing the highest levels of food insecurity as a province within Canada. According to the University of Toronto's PROOF research program, 20.3% of Alberta's households (over 1 in 5) experienced food insecurity, well above the national average of 15.6%. In addition, Alberta also has the highest rate of severe food insecurity – where households were forced to skip meals or even go whole days without eating because they could not afford to – at 6.3% (compared to the national average of 4.2%). Among household compositions on a national level, lone-parent households led by a female had the highest rate of food insecurity at 38.1% followed by lone-parent households led by a male at 20.9%. When compared to households led by couples without children and households led by couples with children, the latter have a 17% higher odds of being food insecure.⁵²

With food insecurity rising, this means visits to food banks also increase. According to Food Banks Canada's HungerCount 2022 report, food bank visits in Alberta increased by 73% between 2019 and 2022. Of the 155,722 visits in Alberta, 57,750 were children (37.1%). The number of children served by Alberta's food banks exceeds the national average of 33.1%.⁵³ Edmonton's Food Bank, for example, has seen unprecedented levels of demand for their services in the wake of both the COVID-19 pandemic and rising inflation. In June 2022, Edmonton's Food Bank helped 34,867 people through its food hamper program, which is both double the numbers from June 2020 and the most people served in its entire 41-year history.⁵⁴

In response to these alarming levels of food insecurity, the Government of Alberta has committed \$20 million over two years to food charities to help with the purchase and transport of food and help pay for front-line staff. They will also support donation-matching campaigns to encourage Albertans to donate to food banks.⁵⁵ It is exceedingly rare for food banks to receive funding from any level of government as they typically rely on community and corporate donations.

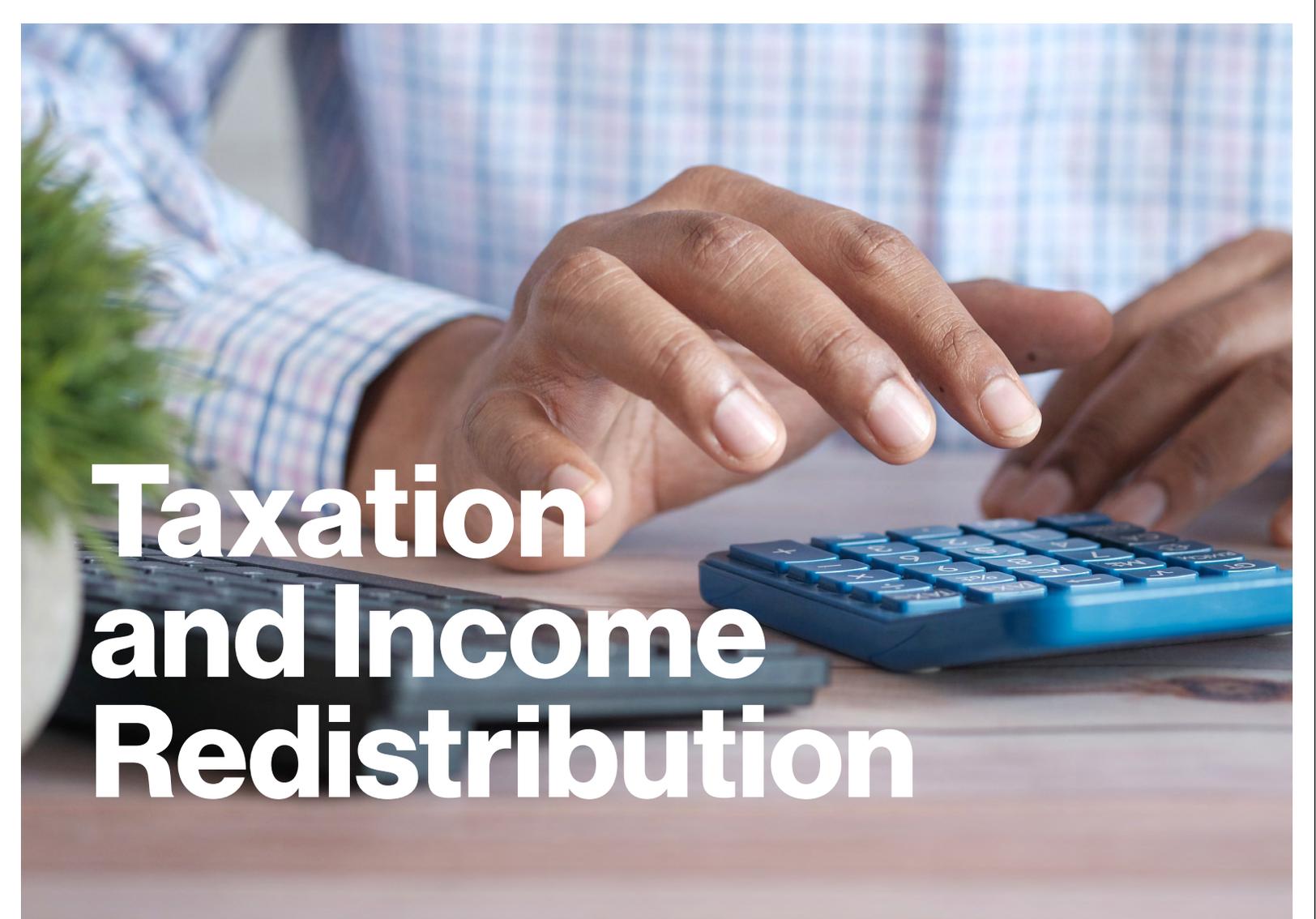
A crucial way of addressing hunger within children is through school nutrition programs. Without access to a healthy meal, students do not have the ability to focus and learn. According to dietitians, students learn best when they eat every two or three hours during the hours they are awake.⁵⁶ Students enrolled in schools with a universal breakfast program had fewer discipline problems, better attendance, and improved psychosocial well-being.⁵⁷

The delivery of these programs to schools in need across Canada is a patchwork and Alberta is no exception. Student participation rates vary widely and Alberta has some of the lowest with only 5% of students in 18% of Alberta's schools having access to a government-funded school food program, one of the lowest participation rates in the nation.⁵⁸

The Government of Alberta's School Nutrition Program currently helps about 40,000 students in schools with a daily meal. For the 2022/23 school year, the province is allocating \$20 million to the program.⁵⁹ While students who are part of the program receive a daily meal from the government-funded program, other meal programs provided by non-profits, service clubs, or private may only be available two or three times a week or to a limited number of students within a school.⁶⁰ With rising food costs and increasing demand for school breakfast programs being felt across the province,^{61,62,63} it is crucial that robust and predictable funding is set aside to ensure students thrive in an optimal learning environment.

In Canada, food security is directly tied to income security. With inflation at an all-time high, making ends meet and contending with the rising cost of living will make a challenging situation that much more dire for those living with low incomes.

Whether one's primary source of income is through employment or social assistance, food security will continue to be a challenge if household incomes do not keep pace with inflation. While food banks and community kitchens address an urgent and immediate need, these initiatives are not able to tackle the systemic causes of food insecurity, which is unstable and inadequate incomes.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands using a blue calculator on a desk. The person is wearing a blue and white checkered shirt. The background is slightly blurred, showing a green plant on the left and a keyboard on the desk. The title 'Taxation and Income Redistribution' is overlaid in large white text on the left side of the image.

Taxation and Income Redistribution

Without income redistribution achieved through a variety of integrated interventions, poverty, and more specifically child poverty, will not be meaningfully alleviated, let alone eliminated.

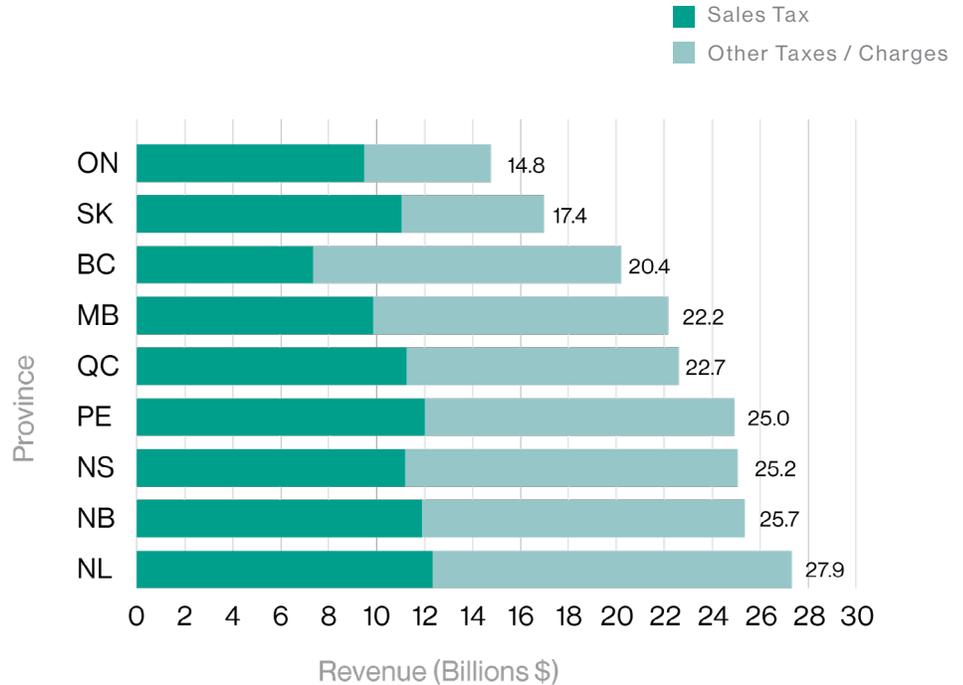
Reforms to tax policy, income transfers, and employment standards; guaranteed incomes; universally accessible services; and market regulation are all tools that governments must explore in order to address inequality and poverty. In the end, a combination of some or all of these policies are necessary if the provincial and federal governments are truly invested in ending child poverty. Inaction on these structural fiscal and economic policies is the foundational reason why the Child Poverty Report is still necessary today – some 23 years after the House of Commons originally pledged to end child poverty.

It is possible for Alberta to raise between \$5 billion and \$15 billion in additional revenue each year, without raising taxes for 90% of Albertans. This can be accomplished by implementing progressive tax reforms, such as: reformed progressive personal income tax steps, returning to a competitive and fair corporate income tax, implementing an excess profits tax, a wealth tax and luxury goods tax, and reforming its royalty system.⁶⁴

Alberta's own budget documents from 2022-23 show that if Alberta adjusted its tax regime to that of Ontario's, our province would generate an additional \$14.8 billion dollars, annually. Even without introducing a sales tax on everyday goods and services, Alberta could raise billions of dollars more in revenue each year.⁶⁵

FIGURE 12
Alberta's Tax Advantage, 2022-23

This graph shows the total additional provincial tax and carbon charges that individuals and businesses would pay if Alberta had the same tax system and carbon charges as other provinces. This information reflects tax rates for other provinces known as of February 2, 2022. This comparison includes personal and corporate income tax, sales tax, fuel tax, carbon charges (excluding the federal carbon pricing backstop), tobacco tax, health premium, payroll tax, liquor tax and markups, land transfer tax and other minor taxes.



Canada and Alberta's taxation policies, the persistent privatization of social services, and deregulation of markets – including previously public/non-profit ones – has led to a system more favourable to high-income earners and already profitable corporations than to working families and children.

As a starting point, the provincial government must consider all taxes in the current system and address the higher overall tax burden on the lowest income earners as compared to higher income earners.

Alberta should also reject any return to a “flat-tax” system for personal income taxes. Not only would a return to this system reduce the province's general revenue, but it would shift more of the overall tax burden to lower income earners, exacerbating inequality, unaffordability, and poverty.

Instead, Alberta should renovate its fiscal and tax policy on the principles of sustainability, equity and predictability. This process should be undertaken in consultation with Albertans, workers, economists from different schools of thought, and policy makers who understand the impact of tax policy's impact on the lives and livelihoods of Albertans and of the economy in the short and long-term.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Poverty has long-lasting impacts on the physical, mental, and social well-being of children and youth. The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting government interventions have proven that governments have the means to make significant reductions in child and family poverty. We cannot let progress die with the pandemic.

Below are recommendations for the Canadian, Albertan, and various municipal governments to consider to reduce child poverty:

General

Ensure that all children can realize the right to an adequate standard of living by creating and implementing a provincial poverty reduction strategy with targets and timelines.

Consider the development of a complementary Strategy for Children and Youth.

Track progress using the Census Family Low Income Measure, After Tax (CFLIM-AT) calculated with T1 Family File data, rather than the Market Basket Measure (MBM) which currently is being used as Canada's official poverty measure.

Learn from the COVID-19 pandemic and improve benefits available to families, including the CCB and ACFB. Increase benefit amounts given to parents and change reduction rates so parents are not penalized for increasing their incomes.

Reverse government benefit reductions due to receiving the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) for moderate income families and protect the CCB from future clawbacks with legislative amendments. Implement CERB Repayment Amnesty for everyone living below or near the CFLIM-AT.

Increase the provincial minimum wage to levels closer to the Living Wage, and remove the tiered minimum wage structure so that both youth and adults are guaranteed the same minimum wage. Ensure the minimum wage is indexed to inflation moving forward.

Indigenous and Racialized Children

Collaborate with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis governments and organizations to develop plans to end child and family poverty.

Entrench Nation to Nation, government to government and Inuit-Crown relationships by ensuring respect for inherent rights, treaties, title, and jurisdiction; full participation in economic growth; sufficient, predictable, long-term funding to achieve well-being; and evidence-based closure of socio-economic outcome gaps.

Meaningfully move forward anti-racism action plans at all levels of government. Governments should be in regular communication with racialized communities to ensure that plans are enacted in a way that serve their needs and reflect their lived experiences.

Child Care

Replace patchwork funding and subsidy system with universal operational funding and regulated fee schedule, with flexibility to accommodate an ability-to-pay sliding scale, between \$0 dollars-per-day and \$10 dollars-per-day.

For workforce recruitment, training, and retention, develop a regulated wage grid, standardize educational and certification requirements, and require ongoing professional development opportunities.

Ensure adequate capital and operational funding is provided to ensure child care spaces are up to the accessibility standards of partners and allies in the sector.

The province must partner with municipalities to ensure high quality, accessible, and affordable services are available in rural and remote areas.

Strategically focus resources on the expansion of licensed public and non-profit centres and spaces.

Honour and fund the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework.

Housing

Invest in more social and affordable housing so that marginalized groups (especially those with children) are less likely to live in core housing need. Consider the development of a complementary Strategy for Children and Youth.

Enhance the Canada Housing Benefit so that families with children are not left behind. Increase income thresholds so that more families may access the benefit.

Take immediate action on the commitment to ending homelessness as part of Canada's international human rights obligations.

Food Security

Given that food (in)security is deeply tied to income security and access to financial resources, enacting any of the other recommendations listed will go a long way in advancing food security.

Expand the School Nutrition program to address increased demand for the program so students can properly learn without having to deal with hunger while in school.

Taxation and Income Redistribution

Review Alberta's income tax system and ensure a more progressive system applies to corporations and the highest earners.

Explore and implement an excess profits tax and make sure tax loopholes are closed.

Eliminate public subsidies to profitable corporations, including the UCP government's planned oil well clean up incentive program.

Review Alberta's non-renewable royalties system and raise rates to further benefit Albertans now and into the future.

Review all legislation and regulations impacting cost of living for low and middle income Albertans, beginning with the Employment Standards Code and Residential Tenancies Act for opportunities to reduce family poverty.

Urgently review Alberta's surplus and direct significant investments to income supports and programs proved to reduce family and child poverty.



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