

Keep Investing in Alberta's Children: The Government's Role in Ending Child and Family Poverty

November 2017

Prepared in partnership by:



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A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

There are methodological differences in the calculation of low-income rates between the 2016 Census and the T1FF dataset. While both report on low-income, T1FF uses the census family as the unit of measure while the 2016 Census uses the household. This, coupled with the application of different equivalency scales to the data, result in different low-income thresholds and therefore slightly different rates of child and family poverty (Khanna, 2017).

It is notable that the 2016 census calculation of low-income rates excludes First Nations people living on reserve, while these individuals are included in the T1FF low-income rates (Khanna, 2017).

Census data reports on child poverty rates for those ages 0 to 5, which the T1FF dataset does not. T1FF data will be used to report on the child poverty rate for those ages 0-17, and census data will be used to measure poverty among children ages 0 to 5.

This report uses the After-Tax Low-Income Measure (AT LIM). After-Tax LIM is the international standard used to measure poverty and deprivation between countries. Using AT LIM, those with after-tax income at 50% or below the national after-tax median income, adjusted for family size, are considered to be living in low-income. The table below shows the annual low-income (poverty) lines for different family sizes using the After-Tax Low-Income Measure.

2015 After-Tax Low-Income Measure

Number of Children Less Than 16 Years of Age	Number of Adults			
	1	2	3	4
0	18,213	25,498	32,783	40,069
1	25,498	30,962	38,247	45,533
2	30,962	36,426	43,711	50,996
3	36,426	41,890	49,175	56,460
4	41,890	47,354	54,639	61,924

WHY CHILD POVERTY?

While it is crucial for government programs to focus on poverty reduction among all vulnerable populations in the country, this report focuses specifically on child poverty. This is because when children experience poverty, they are more vulnerable to various disadvantages and barriers later in life in the areas of employment, education, health, home ownership, and others. If governments of all levels can address the root causes of poverty such as inadequate income, lack of affordable housing, violence, food insecurity, discrimination, and others, the cycle of poverty can be broken and all children in Canada could have access to the resources needed for them to thrive (Boros and Pettes, 2015). Children and teens living in poverty are also more vulnerable to experiencing poor academic achievement, dropping out of school, abuse, neglect, behavioural and emotional problems, physical health struggles, and developmental delays. These challenges are worsened by the barriers that families and children living in poverty experience when they try to access health services (American Psychological Association, 2017).

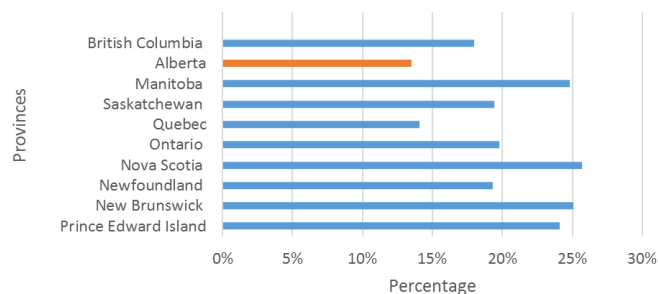
CHILDREN IN POVERTY AGES 0 TO 5

Census data is used in this report to showcase child poverty rates for children ages 0 to 5, which the taxfiler data set does not report on. While the census data is valuable, it does not include on-reserve First Nations children, which could significantly impact the numbers. Based on 2016 census data, 41,755 children in Alberta between the ages of 0 to 5 live in poverty, making up 13.5% of all children (Statistics Canada, 2017c). The 7 biggest urban centres in Alberta have the following poverty rates for children ages 0 to 5:

- Calgary: 12.5%
- Edmonton: 14.1%
- Red Deer: 15.3%
- Lethbridge: 17.3%
- Wood Buffalo: 6.4%
- Medicine Hat: 16.7%
- Grande Prairie: 10%

The next chart shows a comparison of provincial child poverty rates for children ages 0 to 5. Alberta's rate is the lowest among the provinces at 13.5%, followed distantly by Quebec for the second lowest at 14.1%. While Alberta's poverty rate for children ages 0 to 5 is the lowest among provinces across the country, there is still a significant number of children entering the cycle of poverty at a young age. Any number that is higher than zero is unacceptable and requires immediate action (Statistics Canada, 2017c).

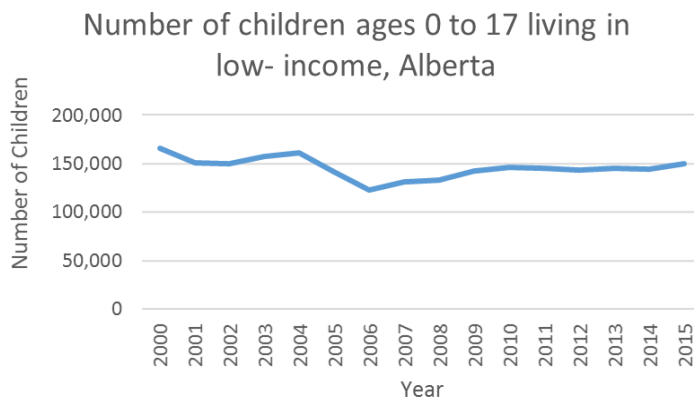
Child poverty rates, children ages 0 to 5, provinces, 2015



Statistics Canada, 2017c

CHILDREN IN POVERTY AGES 0 TO 17 IN ALBERTA

As of 2015 in Alberta, there are 149,700 children ages 0 to 17 living in poverty, up from 144,620 in 2014. This equates to 15.7%, or more than 1 in 6 Albertan children living in poverty. The number of children dropped significantly between 2005 and 2006, but has since increased. Since 2006, there has been a 21.9% growth of children living in poverty (Statistics Canada, 2017).

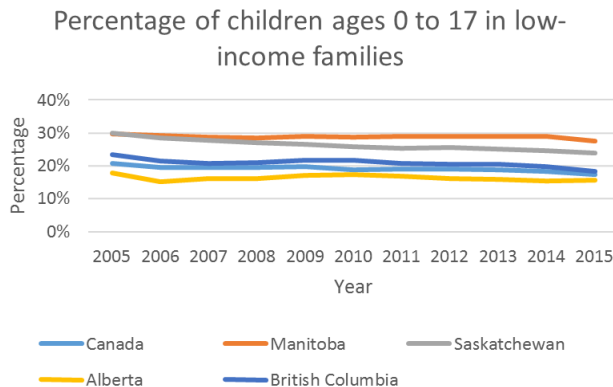


Statistics Canada, 2017

As of 2015, there are 69,500 children living in low-income, couple families and 80,200 in low-income, lone-parent families. There are 9,100 children living in low-income, couple families with one child, 19,450 with two children and 40,950 with three or more children. There are 19,110 children living in low-income, lone-parent families with one child, 24,050 children in families with two children, and 37,040 children in families with three or more children (Statistics Canada, 2017).

CHILD POVERTY RATES, AGES 0 TO 17, PROVINCIAL COMPARISON

As of 2015, 15.7% of children in Alberta live in poverty, compared to 15.5% in 2014 and 15.8% in 2013. Since 2005, there has been a modest reduction of two percentage points of the proportion of Albertan children living in low-income families. However, Alberta's rate is significantly lower than surrounding provinces, with British Columbia's rate at 18.3% and Saskatchewan's at 24% (Statistics Canada, 2017).



Statistics Canada, 2017

CHILD POVERTY RATES, AGES 0 TO 17 ACROSS URBAN AREAS

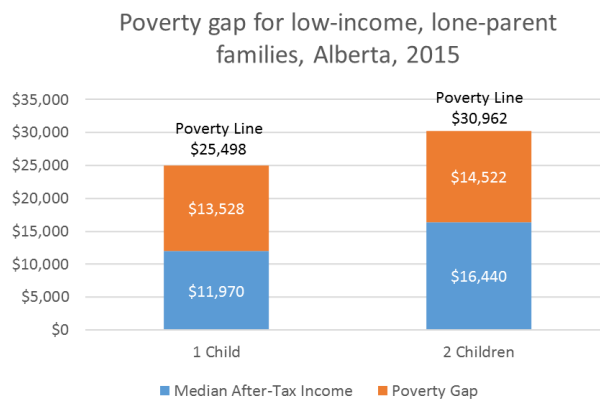
Below are the child poverty rates across the 7 biggest urban areas in the province (Statistics Canada, 2017):

- Calgary: 13.6%
- Edmonton: 15.1%
- Red Deer: 14.5%
- Lethbridge: 16.3%
- Wood Buffalo: 9.6%
- Medicine Hat: 15.4%
- Grande Prairie: 12.8%

LOW-INCOME

LOW-INCOME FAMILIES – POVERTY GAP

Low-income families in Alberta experience a significant poverty gap, meaning their actual median after-tax incomes are lower than the poverty line for the same family type. As of 2015, low-income, lone-parent families with one child in Alberta have a median after-tax income of \$11,970, while the poverty line for this family is \$25,498, meaning there is a \$13,528 gap. For families with two children, the median after-tax income is \$16,440, with a poverty line of \$30,962, resulting in a \$14,522 poverty gap. It is clear that low-income, lone-parent families in Alberta require significantly higher incomes to simply be lifted over the poverty line (Statistics Canada, 2017). In Alberta, there are 161,260 lone-parent families, with 123,490 headed by a female parent, and 37,770 by a male parent (Statistics Canada, 2017c).



Statistics Canada, 2017

The situation is similar for low-income, couple families in Alberta. The median after-tax income for couples with one child, for example, is \$16,960, with a poverty line of \$30,962, leaving a poverty gap of \$14,002. The implementation of the Alberta Child Benefit, continued enhancements of the Alberta Family Employment Tax Credit, and a full year of the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) can make significant progress in closing the poverty gap for low-income families (Statistics Canada, 2017).

SIGNS OF ECONOMIC RECOVERY IN ALBERTA

Alberta's economy has continued to recover since the decline in oil prices and showed growth over the first several months of 2017. Real GDP growth has been revised from 2.6% to 3.1% and Alberta has added close to 17,000 jobs in the first seven months of 2017. Despite signs of recovery, the government is still receiving less revenue than forecast in its 2017-18 budget. As of August 2017, total revenue is forecast to be \$44.4 billion, \$648 million lower than the recent budget (Government of Alberta, 2017).

Lower than estimated oil prices have reduced the forecast of non-renewable resource revenue, which is \$377 million less than estimated in the 2017-18 budget. In addition, effects of the economic downturn have reduced revenue from personal income tax, which is estimated to be \$312 million lower than the recent budget. The West Texas Intermediate oil price forecast went from \$55 in the 2017-18 budget to \$49 per barrel as of August 2017, leading to less non-renewable resource revenue (Government of Alberta 2017).

GOVERNMENT INVESTMENTS IN POVERTY REDUCTION

With its 2017 budget, the Government of Alberta increased funding for Employment and Income Support from \$698 million in 2016-17 to \$826 million, including \$605 million for income support programs. These programs are crucial in assisting low-income Albertans in covering their basic expenses and gives them access to career and labour market information (Government of Alberta, 2016 and 2017e).

The Government of Alberta has also increased its funding for Homeless Outreach and Support Services, increasing it from \$181 million in 2016-17 to \$187 million in 2017-18. This funding will help support the most vulnerable Albertan citizens. It will help house approximately 2,000 homeless people, support 3,300 spaces in 26 homeless shelters, 710 beds in 30 women's shelters, and will provide more assistance and support for women and children fleeing family violence (Government of Alberta, 2016 and 2017e). In addition, funding for homeless shelters increased to \$43 million from \$40 million in 2016-17 (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2017).

Considerable investment is going towards building or renovating affordable housing in the recent budget's Capital Plan. \$248 million is being allocated, with a total of \$737 million over a four-year period. These additional provincial dollars combined with federal funding should go some way to begin addressing the long wait lists of approximately 15,000 households needing affordable housing (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2017).

In response to intense criticism on how the government handled the death of a four-year old Indigenous girl while in the child intervention system, the Government of Alberta created the Ministry of Children's Services, formerly under the umbrella of the Ministry of Human Services. The government also created the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention to recommend how Alberta can improve its death review process, to propose how to improve the child intervention system, and to explore the reasons why children end up in government care. To support these efforts, the Government of Alberta budgeted \$766 million in 2017-18 for child intervention as part of the total budget for the new ministry at \$1.4 billion (Government of Alberta, 2017e).

The Government of Alberta increased its funding for Early Intervention Services for Children and Youth to \$103 million, up from \$92 million in the previous budget. This funding will support Parent Link Centres and home visitation programs. In addition, there will be an additional \$11 million in funding to support Parent Link Centres in Indigenous communities and mental health programming (Government of Alberta, 2017e).

In the 2017-18 budget, the Government of Alberta delivered on its promise to reduce school fees. With the introduction of Bill 1: An Act to Reduce School Fees, the government eliminates fees related to instruc-

tional materials and transportation for eligible students. This bill is important in reducing child poverty as it eliminates barriers to education for all Alberta families. It ensures all children will have access to the resources needed for them to succeed without financial burden being placed on their families (Government of Alberta, 2017e).

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

As of 2016, the population in Alberta is 4,067,175, compared to 3,645,257 in 2011. As of 2016, 36% of tenant households spend 30% or more of its income on shelter costs, and 10.4% of tenant households live in subsidized housing. In Alberta, 308,485 tenant and owner households spend 30% or more of its income on shelter costs with 1,170,780 households spending less than 30%. In addition, 87,240 housing structures need major repairs, 1,440,440 need only minor ones and shockingly, 69,125 units in Alberta are deemed as unsuitable (Statistics Canada, 2017d).

MAKING LIFE BETTER: ALBERTA'S PROVINCIAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING STRATEGY

Through its affordable housing strategy, the Government of Alberta is investing \$1.2 billion over five years to build, renovate, and improve existing affordable housing units across the province. In addition, the plan sees the increase of asset limits for individuals in affordable housing programs from \$7,000 to \$25,000. Public Interest Alberta and the Edmonton Social Planning Council are pleased to see the implementation of higher asset limits. The organizations have made this recommendation several times and feel positive about the government seeing its importance. This will encourage more families to save for things like education and buying a home, and will allow them to avoid severe financial stress (Government of Alberta, 2017c).

The target set out in this strategy is to complete 4,100 new and renovated affordable housing units by 2021, to modernize seniors' lodges, to provide all tenants (especially seniors) with a tenant support worker by 2020-2021, to increase the number of Albertans who believe affordable housing helps them to meet their needs and to achieve their goals, to increase the percentage of Albertans in mixed income buildings who believe the model meets their housing needs, and to increase the sustainability of the affordable housing system (Government of Alberta, 2017c).

HIGH QUALITY AND AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE

Campaign 2000, a national campaign working to eliminate child poverty in the country, has continuously called for a universal, high quality, affordable, and accessible childcare system as part of its plan to end child poverty in Canada. Campaign 2000 argues that a national childcare system is crucial to help families escape poverty, to enter or stay in the workforce, and to build strong and inclusive communities (Macdonald and Klinger, 2015).

The median preschool daycare fee in Edmonton in 2016 was \$825/month. The following five cities have the highest preschool fees in Canada (Macdonald and Friendly, 2016):

- Toronto: \$1,150
- Kitchener: \$1,031
- Calgary: \$1,010
- Vaughn: \$1,005
- Markham: \$996

As part of its platform for the 2015 provincial election, Alberta's NDP government proposed the following, "We will invest in childcare, creating new spaces and improving affordability, quality and access. We will move toward \$25-a-day care in quality child care centres as Alberta's finances permit" (Vernon, 2016). In April 2017, Notley's government implemented a \$25/day childcare pilot program. The pilot is designed to test a variety of childcare arrangements with the hope of the province moving to a provincial \$25/day program when finances allow (Thomson, 2017).

The pilot program will offer 1,296 licensed and high quality spaces in the Early Learning and Child Care Centres, with 714 of these being new. In addition, 636 new spaces will be created in 9 new programs and in 13 existing ones. More importantly, many of the new programs will provide parenting support and resources to vulnerable families including parenting teens, and low-income and lone-parent families (Government of Alberta, 2017d).

POVERTY COSTS ALBERTANS

Vibrant Communities Calgary and Action to End Poverty in Alberta estimate that poverty costs Alberta residents \$7.1-\$9.5 billion each year, equating to each person contributing \$2,700 to \$3,600 (Vibrant Communities Calgary and Action to End Poverty in Alberta, 2015). To prevent and reduce poverty, the Government of Alberta is investing \$5.1 billion into programs and services aimed to make life more affordable, support wellness and social inclusion, increase funding for affordable housing and homeless supports, and enhance skills, education, and training opportunities (Government of Alberta, 2017i).

TREATING THE ROOT CAUSES OF POVERTY

Treating the root causes of poverty is more effective than simply managing it after it occurs. Ambrose Place is a supportive housing community in Edmonton located in the McCauley neighbourhood. Its purpose is to provide housing and support services to Indigenous singles and couples who have been unsuccessful in other facilities in the city. In addition, the organization provides housing in a culturally sensitive and appropriate manner for those who do not need extra supports (NigiNan Housing Ventures, n.d).

It has 42 units and works with Indigenous elders, Alberta Health Services, Athabasca University, and MacEwan University to track the impact of this housing model for the individuals and the community as a whole. The organization has nursing staff on duty 24 hours a day, a kitchen, a First Nations elder, and support workers (Stolte, 2017).

Ambrose Place has saved significant public funds. According to the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA), supportive/social housing costs \$25-\$31 per person each day, compared to a psychiatric inpatient bed at \$665/day or jail at \$143/day. Affordable and supportive housing facilities not only serve a human purpose by housing the most vulnerable residents, but they also save public funds and allow them to be diverted elsewhere (Kirman, 2016).

FOOD IN ALBERTA

FOOD BANK USAGE ON THE RISE

Over the past several years, food bank usage has increased substantially. In 2016, 79,293 Albertans accessed food banks, compared to 33,580 in 2008, representing a growth of 136.1%. Since 2015, the number of Albertans who accessed the food bank grew by 17.5% (Food Banks Canada, 2016).

When broken down by age, 39.3% of food bank users are under the age of 17, a decrease from 41.2% in 2015. In 2016, lone-parent families account for 25.3% of all food bank users in Alberta, compared to 32.2% in 2015. Social assistance is the primary source of income for food bank users in Alberta (26%), followed by job income (25.1%), and disability related income (12.7%) (Food Banks Canada, 2016).

From May 25 to June 16, 2015, Edmonton Food Bank staff and volunteers interviewed 402 clients at the main food bank location and at 18 community depots across the city (Edmonton Food Bank, 2015). Of those surveyed:

- 53% reported their annual household income to be under \$25,000
- 47% ran out of money by the second week of the month
- 70% had no funds by the third week
- 43% said they would not need support from the food bank if their income went up by \$500/month
- 34% said they have skipped meals so their children could eat

FOOD INSECURITY

The following groups are more vulnerable to experiencing food insecurity in Alberta: low-income households, recent immigrants or refugees, lone-parents, single people, social assistance recipients, sexual minority individuals, people with a disability, and households with young children. Health Canada reported that in 2012, 1 in 12 Albertan households experienced moderate to severe food insecurity. If those experiencing a marginal level were included in this statistic, the prevalence increases to 1 in 10 households (Alberta Health Services, 2017).

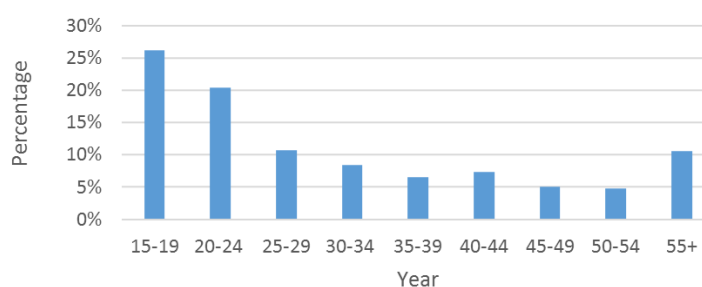
Approximately 8 of 10 food insecure households in Alberta rely on employment earnings as their main source of income, yet they are unable to afford an adequate amount of food for each individual living in their household. As of 2012, 47% of Indigenous households on-reserve in Alberta experienced either moderate or severe food insecurity. The rate is significantly higher when compared to Ontario (29%), Manitoba (38%), and British Columbia (41%) (Alberta Health Services, 2017).

LABOUR AND POVERTY

LOW WAGE EARNERS

As of the time period between April 2016 and March 2017, 292,400 employees (15.5%) in Alberta are classified as low wage earners, meaning their average hourly wage is below \$15. In Alberta, 73.8% of low wage earners are over the age of 20, contradicting the myth that only teenagers living with their parents work in low wage jobs. In addition, 79.0% of low wage earners work in a permanent position and 21% in temporary jobs (Government of Alberta, 2017a).

Percentage of low wage earners by age group, Alberta, April 2016-March 2017



Government of Alberta, 2017a

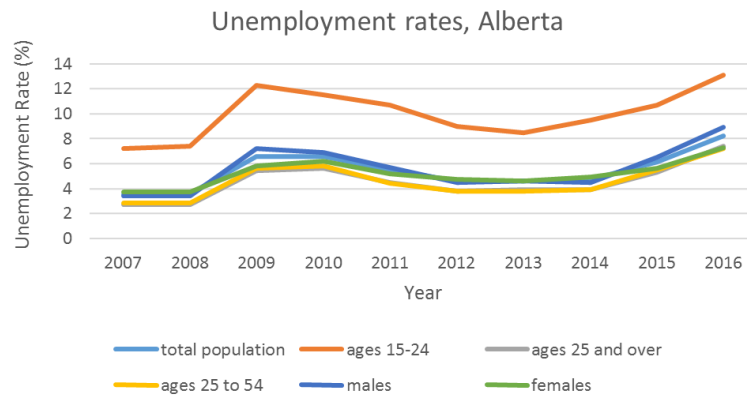
Of low wage earners in Alberta, 172,200 (59.6%) are female and 118,200 (40.4%) are male. When divided by family type, 25.4% of low wage earners are married, dual earners with children and 7.7% are married, single earner families with children. In addition, 18,200 low wage earners, or 6.2%, are lone-parents with children (Government of Alberta, 2017a).

INCREASES IN MINIMUM WAGE

By October 1, 2018, the minimum wage for all workers in Alberta will be \$15/hour, up from \$13.60/hour on October 1, 2017. These increases act as poverty reduction methods, as low wage earners should be able to feed their families nutritious food without relying on the food bank. According to the Government of Alberta, paying a higher wage can help to alleviate poverty, to lessen reliance on social support programs, and to improve the quality of life for all citizens. It is also argued that the move to a \$15/hour minimum wage will improve employee satisfaction, helping to reduce recruitment and training costs for employers. While this is a strong step in the right direction for poverty reduction, there is still more to be done considering the living wage in the City of Edmonton is \$1.31 more than the minimum wage increase scheduled for October 2018 (Government of Alberta, n.d). Of the 1,895,000 employed Albertans, 221,600 earn the new minimum wage with 60.3% being women (Public Interest Alberta, 2017).

UNEMPLOYMENT

As of 2016 in Alberta, the unemployment rate for the total population is 8.2%, an increase from 6.1% in 2015. Since 2007, the unemployment rate in Alberta has grown by 134.2%. In addition, youth have an extraordinary high unemployment rate when compared to other age groups. The 15 to 24 year age group's unemployment rate in 2016, for example, is 13.1%, compared to 7.4% among the 25 and over age group and 7.2% among 25 to 54 year olds. As of 2016 in Alberta, the male unemployment rate is 8.9% and the female rate is 7.3%. Since 2007, the male unemployment rate has grown by 161.7% and for females by 97.2% (Statistics Canada, 2016).



Statistics Canada, 2016

CHILD BENEFITS AS POVERTY REDUCTION METHODS

CHILD BENEFITS AND POVERTY

Government transfer programs are important poverty reduction tools. Since 2014, government transfers have had a significant impact on the child poverty rate in Alberta. Government transfer programs are believed to alleviate poverty for families and children by transferring money directly into the pockets of families who need assistance. Without child benefits, the child poverty rate in Alberta in 2014 was 21% and with the implementation of the benefits, the rate was 15.5% (Campaign 2000, 2016).

GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR CHILD BENEFITS

The Alberta government continues to show its commitment to poverty reduction efforts by increasing funding for child benefit programs. In the 2017-18 provincial budget, the government provides \$174 million in financial support through the Alberta Child Benefit (ACB), targeting the lowest income families with children in Alberta. This represents an increase from the \$125 million projected in 2016-17 (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2017).

IMPROVEMENTS IN CHILD BENEFITS

Government transfers available to families have improved, transferring more money into the pockets of families. As of 2017, under the Alberta Family Employment Tax Credit (AFETC), benefits begin to be phased out at \$41,786 of net family income, an increase from \$41,250 the previous year (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2017b). In 2017, Albertans will receive a full twelve months of the further enhanced and improved AFETC (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2017b).

Under the Canada Child Benefit (CCB), families with children under 17 now receive a maximum yearly benefit of \$6,400/child for children under 6 and \$5,400/child for children ages 6 to 17. As of 2017, families receive a full year of this benefit, as opposed to six months (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2017b).

WORK AS POVERTY REDUCTION

A LIVING WAGE FOR CONTRACTED SERVICES

Edmonton's living wage for 2017 is \$16.31/hour, which represents the wage that a family of four requires to live in economic stability and to maintain a modest standard of living. Edmonton's living wage for 2016 was \$16.69/hour, \$0.67 less than the 2015 amount of \$17.36/hour (Canadian Living Wage Framework, 2015). These decreases are attributed to improved benefits transferring more money directly into the pockets of low and modest income Albertans (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2017). The impact of improved child and family benefits on the City of Edmonton's living wage shows how crucial these benefits are as poverty reduction tools (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2017a).

Living wage rates across the province are as follows (Living Wage Canada, n.d):

- Edmonton: \$16.31/hour
- Calgary: \$18.15/hour
- Grande Prairie: \$17.35/hour
- Medicine Hat: \$13.65/hour
- Red Deer and Central Alberta: \$13.81-\$14.10/hour

NATIONAL POVERTY REDUCTION EFFORTS

CANADIAN POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY

The Government of Canada is taking the first steps to create an extensive poverty reduction strategy. To ensure the plan reflects the needs of Canadians experiencing poverty, the government is undergoing the following processes: consulting with citizens across the country on poverty reduction, creating a Ministerial Advisory Committee on Poverty, and conducting the *Tackling Poverty Together* research project (Government of Canada, 2017a). The Government is also reaching out to provincial, territorial, and municipal government partners, Indigenous peoples, community organizations, poverty experts, academics, the business community, and those with lived experience of poverty. Governments at all levels have implemented policies favourable to poverty reduction, and the federal government is seeking opinions on how best to align the national strategy with existing initiatives. While the Alberta government has made great progress in poverty reduction, the province does not have an overall strategy, which would be helpful for setting goals, measuring progress, and evaluating the effectiveness of policy changes (Government of Canada, 2017b).

POVERTY REDUCTION IN MUNICIPALITIES

ACCESS TO SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

Access to recreation, culture, arts, and other services and programs are crucial to healthy and engaged communities. The City of Edmonton's Leisure Access Program (LAP) allows eligible low-income Edmontonians to access recreational programs at participating facilities (City of Edmonton, 2017).

In addition, in July 2017, the City of Edmonton introduced the low-income transit pass, aimed at making transit more affordable for low-income Edmontonians and to enable them to meet their health needs, to fully participate in their communities, and to find employment. When it was created, Edmonton Mayor, Don Iveson, estimated that the pass would help 20,000 low-income Edmontonians access public transit (Ramsay, 2016).

The City of Calgary has a similar pass aimed at increasing the accessibility of public transit to low-income and vulnerable Calgary residents (Calgary Transit, n.d). The City of Calgary has implemented a sliding scale fare structure to eliminate the financial barriers to accessing public transportation to ensure everyone can fully participate in their community. Based on household size and total income, Calgarians either pay \$5.05, \$35.35, or \$50.50 per month for a transit pass. The sliding scale is developed in such a way that the less a customer earns, the less they pay for the transit pass. However, all who qualify will receive at least a 50% discount on the price. The Calgary and Edmonton low-income transit passes are partly funded by the Government of Alberta (The City of Calgary, n.d).

Similarly, the City of Grande Prairie has a Low Income Access Program for eligible low-income families and individuals to ensure all citizens have access to city recreational centres and public transit. Once applications are approved, a monthly transit pass discounted by 50% is issued to families and individuals. In addition, a \$300 credit is provided for low-income individuals ages 3 and older to access recreational facilities and registered programs (City of Grande Prairie, n.d).

MUNICIPAL POVERTY REDUCTION PLANS

Despite significant action being taken to reduce child and family poverty, Alberta does not have a provincial poverty reduction plan. Alberta and British Columbia are the two provinces without a plan to reduce poverty. Such a plan or strategy is important in setting goals, measuring progress, and evaluating the effectiveness of policy changes (French, 26 October, 2017).

Eight municipalities in Alberta have created anti-poverty plans to reduce the incidence and severity of poverty in their cities. These cities are Calgary, Canmore, Edmonton, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, the Municipal District of Wood Buffalo, Red Deer, and Grande Prairie. These movements focus on local initiatives and efforts, on collecting data, and on building inclusive, socially aware, and engaged communities (Canada Without Poverty, 2016).

The EndPovertyEdmonton Strategy aims to end poverty in the city through a human rights-based approach focusing on recognizing Indigenous rights, addressing systemic issues of inequality, and changing prevalent attitudes about poverty and homelessness (Alberta Poverty Progress Profile, 2016). In December 2016, Edmonton City Council voted to invest in the EndPovertyEdmonton (EPE) Road Map (EndPovertyEdmonton, 2015).

The Calgary Poverty Reduction Initiative (CPRI) was established by the City of Calgary and United Way of Calgary and Area in 2011 to create a community-driven and supported approach to poverty reduction. The result of this was the creation of the Enough for All Strategy that was approved by City Council and the United Way Board of Directors in 2013 (United Way Calgary and Area, 2017).

The four goals of the strategy are listed below:

- All Calgary communities are strong, supportive and inclusive
- Everyone in Calgary has the income and assets needed to thrive
- Everyone in Calgary can easily access the right supports, services, and resources
- All Aboriginal people are equal participants in Calgary's prosperous future

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS AND POVERTY

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RATES

Many Albertans who receive social assistance are permanently unable to work, such as recipients of the Alberta Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) program who have a physical or mental disability. AISH and Alberta Works payments are not indexed to inflation, meaning that in real dollars, the programs provide less and less assistance every year as the cost of living increases. In addition, Alberta's social assistance rates are very low, falling far below any poverty measure used by Statistics Canada (Vibrant Communities Calgary and Action to End Poverty in Alberta, 2015).

The Income Support Program, known as welfare, is a branch of the Alberta Works program. Generally, a single person who is expected to work receives approximately \$627 per month, while a single person experiencing barriers to employment receives \$731 (Edmonton Journal, 2014). Recipients of the AISH program can receive up to \$1,588 per month in benefits. Former Premier Alison Redford raised AISH rates by \$400 in 2012 and the amount has not increased since (Government of Alberta, 2012).

For the purpose of this report, total welfare incomes include social assistance and provincial and federal child benefits and tax credits. Total welfare incomes for two-parent families in Alberta was \$29,753 in 1986 and \$24,841 in 2015, a loss of approximately \$5,000. Similarly, the incomes for single parents with one child went from \$19,030 in 1986 to \$17,403 in 2015 (Tweddle, Battle, and Torjman, 2016).

INCOME SUPPORT CASELOAD INCREASING OVER TIME

Income Support (IS), otherwise known as welfare, provides financial assistance to individuals and families in Alberta who do not have the resources needed to meet their basic needs. In 2007-08, the average Income Support caseload was 25,440 households and was 50,954 in 2016-17, representing a growth of 100.2%. As of August 2017, the Income Support caseload is 55,681, an increase of 0.6% from July 2017. In August 2017, the Income Support caseload was made up of single individuals (68.1%), lone-parent families (24.6%), couples with children (4.8%), and couples without children (2.5%) (Government of Alberta, 2017f).

EI BENEFICIARIES IN ALBERTA

In December 2016, the number of Albertans receiving Employment Insurance (EI) benefits was a near record high of 95,490. Following this, however, the number of EI beneficiaries began to decline, decreasing to 73,630 in May 2017 (Statistics Canada, 2017b). In May 2017, the Alberta labour market experienced a transition back to full-time employment, with the number of positions increasing by 2,900 and the number of part-time positions declining by 3,200 (Government of Alberta, 2017j). From December 2015 to December 2016, the number of beneficiaries went from 62,060 to 95,490, representing a growth of 53.8% (Statistics Canada, 2017b).

WOMEN AND POVERTY

GENDER INEQUALITY AND POVERTY

Poverty is the leading cause of social exclusion in Alberta. The percentage of women living in poverty across the country is consistently higher than the percentage of men in poverty. Women who are part of further marginalized groups such as single mothers, lesbian women, women with disabilities, Indigenous women, women of colour, and others, experience more severe financial challenges than women who are not (The Women's Centre, 2017).

According to the Women's Centre in Calgary, women in Alberta make 63 cents to every dollar men make in full-time and full-year employment. This amounts to women making approximately \$31,000 less than male colleagues. Low incomes also exacerbate existing health issues for women. Women require more access to reproductive and sexual health education, birth control options, and menstrual products. Having a low income is connected to higher risk of teenage pregnancy, greater risk of stillbirth, lower rates of breastfeeding, and higher rates of smoking during pregnancy (The Women's Centre, 2017).

In Edmonton, employment levels are significantly higher for both men and women than in other urban centres. In Edmonton, there is a large employment gap between men and women with 72% of men and 63% of women being in paid employment. Despite higher than average incomes when compared to other urban centres in the province, women in Edmonton still earn 61% of men's incomes, translating to women making \$22,000 less per year than men. In Calgary, 71% of men and 62% of women are in paid employment and women take home 66% of what men earn in similar jobs (McInturff, 2017).

Of the 5,418 women who were admitted to shelters in Alberta in 2015-16, 4,301 women were seeking safety from abuse. In 2015-16, 8,076 women and 8,283 children were rejected from shelters because of a lack of space or capacity (Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, 2016a). Across the province, women's shelters are serving more women who self-identify as Indigenous. In 2015-16, 54.9% of women admitted to shelters identify as Indigenous, even though they make up a much smaller portion of the general population in the province (Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, 2016). There are 258,640 individuals who identify as Indigenous in Alberta, representing 6.3% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2017c).

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

POVERTY AMONGST INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

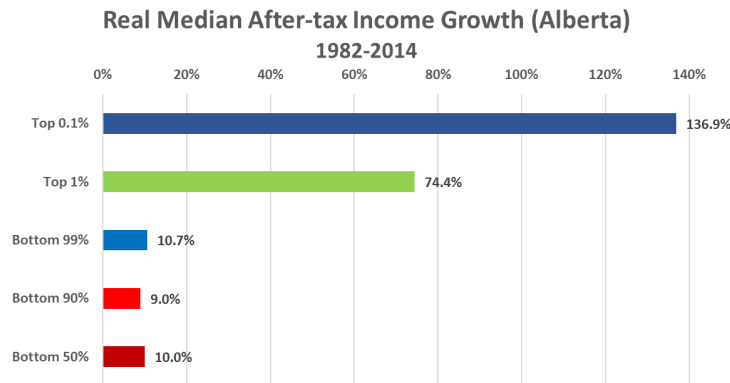
Canada's painful history with residential schools, in addition to the chronic underfunding of Indigenous services both on and off-reserve, has left many First Nations communities living in poverty (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2016). Indigenous peoples can also experience higher rates of diabetes, substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, heart disease, and obesity than the general population (Ubelacker, 2013).

Indigenous peoples in Canada include First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples. According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), Alberta has among the lowest rates of off-reserve Indigenous child poverty in Canada at 26%, compared to Manitoba's rate of 39% and Saskatchewan's of 36%. The child poverty rate for those with First Nations status off-reserve in Alberta is approximately 39%, while for Metis children the rate is much lower at 20%, and for Indigenous children on reserve in Alberta, the poverty rate skyrockets to 60% (Macdonald and Wilson, 2016).

INEQUALITY AND INCOME

INCOME INEQUALITY IN ALBERTA

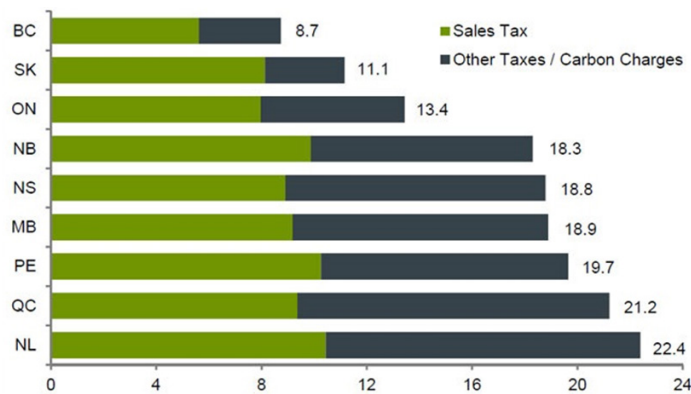
Over the past three decades, income inequality in Alberta has increased, with most of the real income gains (after adjusting for inflation), going to the top 1% of taxfilers. The chart below shows that the top 1% of taxfilers saw a 74.4% increase in their real after-tax incomes compared to only a 10.7% gain for the bottom 99% over the period of 1982 to 2014. Even more dramatically, the top 0.1% (one out of a thousand) of taxfilers saw a 136.9% increase in their real after-tax incomes (Statistics Canada, 2016b and 2017f).



Statistics Canada, 2016b and Statistics Canada, 2017f

ALBERTA'S TAX REVENUE SHORTFALL

The impact of the rapid decline in oil prices continues to effect Alberta's economy and government revenue. Instead of cutting funding for childcare, homelessness and outreach services, affordable housing, and Alberta Works benefits, the government is making a conscious choice to continue investing in the health and wellbeing of all Albertans. The chart below shows the additional revenue that the Alberta government could generate if it had the same tax systems as other Canadian provinces. If Alberta had the same tax system as British Columbia, for example, the government would have an additional \$8.7 billion in revenue. At the other extreme, if Alberta had the same system as Newfoundland, it would have an additional \$22.4 billion in revenue (Government of Alberta, 2017g).



Government of Alberta, 2017g

CONCLUSION

RECOMMENDATIONS

As detailed above, neglecting to address root causes of poverty costs the government \$7.1-\$9.5 billion each year. If the government continues its positive steps towards poverty reduction, it will save individual Albertan residents thousands of dollars each year (Government of Alberta, 2017i).

Below are recommendations for the Government of Alberta that will help to alleviate poverty amongst children and families:

- Implement a living wage for permanent and contract government employees based on municipal calculations
- Begin the process of creating and implementing a provincial poverty reduction strategy or plan
- Expand its \$25/day childcare pilot program to improve affordability, to enhance quality, to create more programs, and to support existing ones
- Implement its campaign platform promise to reduce school classroom sizes
- Implement actions to address the significant shortage of annual tax revenue without cutting funding for crucial social services
- Ensure adequate funding to implement the recommendations of the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention
- Index social assistance rates to the costs of living

In conclusion, the Government of Alberta has taken significant action in reducing child and family poverty in the province, but more work needs to be done. The Government of Alberta delivered on its campaign promise of reducing school fees, has created a provincial affordable housing strategy, and has increased its funding for Early Intervention Services for Children and Youth by \$11 million (Government of Alberta, 2017e). Also, the government implemented its campaign promise of a \$25/day childcare pilot program, which will create new spaces and improve affordability and quality (Thomson, 2017).

The government has improved its transfer programs, transferring more money into the pockets of children and families. As of 2017, under the Alberta Family Employment Tax Credit (AFETC), benefits begin to be phased out at \$41,786 of net family income, an increase from \$41,250 the previous year. The AFETC and the Alberta Child Benefit amounts have been increased and indexed to inflation, meaning the value of the benefit will not decrease overtime as the cost of living increases (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2017b).

The rapid decline in oil prices continues to impact Alberta's economy and government revenue. Instead of cutting funding for crucial public services, the government is making a conscious choice to invest in the health and wellbeing of all citizens. Without additional tax revenue, the government will be unable to balance its budget and to maintain and improve the social and public services that all Albertans depend on without making drastic cuts. For poverty reduction methods to be sustainable, there must be adequate government revenue to ensure funding is available (Government of Alberta, 2017g).

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