

Child Care Protects Socioeconomic Rights

“Alberta’s current approach to tackling the unaffordability of child care in the province is through the use of subsidies.”

ISSUE

Alberta’s lack of affordable child care restricts the full and free participation of women in the labour force, denying many of them of their right to meet their own basic needs.

POLICIES

The “affordability” of child care in Alberta is identified as a priority area of investment for both the provincial and federal government, as set forth in the Canada-Alberta Early Learning and Child Care Agreement—renewed by the province this year (2021). Founded upon the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework, this bilateral agreement outlines how federal funds allocated to support early learning and child care in Alberta are to be spent. This year, the amended Early Learning and Child Care Act (formally the Child Care Licensing Act) and its accompanying regulations came into force in Alberta. While the Act “provides the Alberta government the authority to support, license, inspect, and monitor child care programs,” the Act and associated regulations significantly make no reference to the critical aspect of “affordability.”

PRACTICES

Alberta’s current approach to tackling the unaffordability of child care in the province is through the use of subsidies. The main eligibility requirement to apply for a child care subsidy is a combined household income less than the current income threshold set by the province. For applications that are approved, the amount of subsidy a family receives is determined by a formula, and is paid directly to the licensed child care program on behalf of the family. While competition between market actors in some sectors of the economy can drive down prices, this does not happen in the child care sector. In Alberta, the cost of a child care space is entirely set by the market. Alberta differs in this regard from the provinces of Quebec, Manitoba, and P.E.I., which have set-fee spaces alongside market-fee spaces.

1

The province sets a threshold for determining subsidy allocation

2

A family can apply if their household income is less than that threshold

3

Approved subsidies are paid directly to the child care program

The process of determining eligibility for child care subsidies

RESOURCE FLOWS

Early learning and child care in Alberta is funded by the provincial government, with support from the Government of Canada. In addition to the bilateral agreement for early learning and child care, the federal government also transfers payments to Alberta through the Canada Social Transfer (CST). Alberta parents may also apply for the Canada Child Benefit (CCB), a federal program which provides monthly payments to eligible families to help offset the costs of child care. Child care centre owners and directors, early childhood educators, parents and caregivers, and child care licensing staff are vital resources and stakeholders in the child care ecosystem. The physical infrastructure required for licensed facility-based (daycares, preschools, and out-of-school care programs) and home-based (overseen by a licensed family day home agency) child care programs to operate is another critical asset.

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RELATIONSHIPS & CONNECTIONS

Alberta Premier Jason Kenney and Children’s Minister, Rebecca Schulz have yet to sign onto the federal government’s Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan, which aims to make child care more affordable across Canada by cutting the cost of child care in half by 2022 and reducing child care fees to \$10-a-day by 2026. Tensions between the two levels of government intensified after Kenney accused Ottawa of treating Alberta “like a second-class province” after it accepted the “exact agreement” from Quebec which it had rejected when proposed by Alberta. Alberta’s UCP government is under growing pressure from members of Alberta’s Official Opposition, the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, businesses and municipalities, and child care reform advocates, who are pushing hard for a national child care deal for Alberta.

POWER DYNAMICS

In the 2021 federal Budget, the Government of Canada laid out its Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan. The Plan outlines the government’s goal of working with individual provinces, territories, and Indigenous partners to build and support a Canada-wide, community-based system of affordable, high-quality child care. At this time, Alberta still has an opportunity to join the nation-wide Early Learning and Child Care plan. However, with no guarantee or requirement that Alberta reach an agreement with Ottawa, whether or not Alberta will join other jurisdictions who have signed on is unknown. The approach Alberta takes to tackling the unaffordability of child care in the province moving forward, and the consequences of those actions or inactions, fall squarely on Premier Kenney and select members of his cabinet.





MENTAL MODELS

The mental models underpinning Jason Kenney's UCP government are traditional conservatism, smaller government (market ideology), and maximizing individual freedom. Taken together these held ideologies uniquely allow for government intervention for the purposes of protecting the "traditional" family through supporting parental rights and religious institutions. With regard to child care policies, a consistent theme from Premier Kenney and members of his cabinet is a commitment to "respect and reflect the choices" of parents. Rooted in the beliefs and assumptions held by Premier Kenney and many members of his caucus, child care and its associated costs is viewed by the Alberta government as a family issue as opposed to a collective or social issue. In this way, the approach taken thus far by Kenney's government to address the unaffordability of child care has centred on providing assistance on a targeted family-by-family basis and not through the use of a universal social program.

VIGNETTE

Norway is an example of an international jurisdiction, and one of only a few countries in the world which has successfully addressed the issue of child care unaffordability within its borders. Norway is a social democracy and "has a history of decentralization and local autonomy." Building off Norway's mental models which emphasize "the intrinsic value of childhood and the rights of children in society," child care is viewed as both a public good and public responsibility, which all children have a right to access. Driven by these beliefs, and with the support of most political parties who maintained the lack of equitable access to child care was a problem, Norway established new practices to address child care affordability beginning in the early 2000s. These practices included introducing a monthly maximum child care fee (equivalent to CAD \$445 in 2019), and discounts for every additional child. Norway also mandates that parents pay no more than 6 percent of their income toward childcare (up to that maximum ceiling), and low-income families are entitled to a number of free child care hours per week. Child care centres in Norway today are mainly supported through public funds (86%), with parent fees accounting for the remaining costs.



ADDRESSING POVERTY

How might we remove the socioeconomic barriers to rights?

ISSUE STATEMENT

A lack of housing, resources, and social supports for vulnerable populations produce the conditions for homelessness and housing scarcity which impede an individual's socioeconomic rights.

PRACTICES

There are numerous non-profit organizations across Alberta that are focused on housing initiatives. Alpha House Calgary provides numerous housing programs that includes Community Housing and Permanent-Supportive Housing (PSH), transitional housing for individuals currently experiencing homelessness and transitioning them into Community or Long-Term Housing, assistance in finding living opportunities for community housing clients, and they operate six place-based buildings through the PSH program.

POLICIES

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) is a multi-lateral human rights treaty that came into force on January 3rd, 1967. Canada formally acceded to join the treaty on May 19, 1976, and officially went into force in Canada on August 19, 1976. Through accepting and signing onto this treaty, Canada accepted the obligation to take suitable measures to respect, protect and fulfill their obligations under the ICESCR. In Article 11 of the ICESCR, it states that states "... recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing, and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions". Today, the right to housing is not enshrined in Canada's Constitution Act, 1867 or the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

While the right to housing is not enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Government of Canada employed a National Housing Strategy in 2017. Through this strategy, the Liberal government aims to reduce chronic homelessness by 50%, bring up to 530,000 families out of housing need, and create up to 100,000 new housing units and 300,000 renovated units.

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RESOURCE FLOWS

Funding for housing initiatives typically flows from governments to smaller organizations or business to fulfill their mandate or goals. For example, the province of Alberta offers funding to housing providers so they can build, renew, or maintain housing for seniors, families with low income, and groups with special needs. Further, In May 2021, Edmonton City Council approved \$10.4 million to support the construction of and up to 25% of the capital costs for 124 affordable housing units in four different locations across the city. This money was provided through the Affordable Housing Investment Plan which aims to add 2500 new or renovated affordable housing units across the city of Edmonton.

RELATIONSHIPS & CONNECTIONS

Research, data, and networks are essential to understanding a broader perspective into an issue. Non-profit organizations often have their finger on the pulse of the frontline work that is occurring or needs to occur in communities regarding homelessness. The Calgary Homeless Foundation sets out to fight homelessness in

partnership with all levels of government, homeless serving agencies, faith-based communities, and the general population. Further, they collect data and research to co-create a system-wide and evidence-based approach to serve and find solutions for individuals facing homelessness and housing insecurity.

POWER DYNAMICS

Municipal governments can have a huge impact on what homelessness and housing scarcity looks like in their municipality. In May 2021, Wetaskiwin, AB city council passed a motion that would terminate the agreement that authorized the Open Door Association to lease the towns Civic Building as a shelter. This 24/7 shelter space opened in November 2020, and it provided reprieve for up to 60 individuals each night. Without this space, the municipality has been left without adequate space or services to serve a population in need.

MENTAL MODELS

Stigma and misunderstanding can lead to misinformation and a lack of empathy for vulnerable populations. According to the Homeless Hub, historically on average, individuals that experienced homelessness or housing insecurity in Canada were older, single men. Meanwhile, what we see today is that the population is more diverse and includes more women, families, and youth that are experiencing homelessness than in the past.

VIGNETTE

In 2009, the City of Medicine Hat became one of the first cities in Canada to commit to ending homelessness using the housing first approach. The Medicine Hat Community Housing Society (MHCHS) has led the cities commitment to end homelessness and have housed 1323 individuals since the inception of the strategy. The MHCHS has persevered to implement a systems approach to social issues, which challenges the

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status quo and positively disrupts the system. This approach requires innovative approaches to improve efficiencies and optimize service delivery, while making important changes to the way the organization impacts the community. The MHCHS recognizes that system change is difficult, but it is at the top of their strategic directions.



food insecurity

In Alberta

With improper socioeconomic supports, food insecure Albertan's face a myriad of negative physical and mental health effects which hurt their ability to legally meet other basic needs.

policies

Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms does not explicitly recognize and protect socio-economic rights, but negative state obligations outline that state actions cannot stop an individual's ability to meet their basic needs, which includes available, accessible, and adequate food. Therefore, in government food insecurity is often addressed under income assistance. Policy in Alberta related to food insecurity is often through the Income Support Program. Eligibility and amounts paid are governed by the Income and Employment Supports Act and regulations are subject to change .

Food charity is a common mode of addressing food insecurity in Alberta.

Food charity regulations and safety law are set by the Alberta Food Regulation Act according to the Alberta Public Health Act and the Alberta Food Retail and Food Services Code . Food safety is governed by Alberta Agriculture and forestry, and Alberta Health Services .The Charitable Donation of Food Act proclaimed in 2001 regards the liability of organizations, corporations, staff, and individual donors have if a person consuming the donated food suffers damages . These laws and regulations require that food donated in Alberta is safe and suitable for human consumption and meets all standards set out in the Food Services Code. In addition to this, Alberta Health Services provides a comprehensive guide on the distribution of donated food regulations to ensure the safety of clients

practices

Under Alberta Works, individuals and families can receive Core Benefits which includes the subsection 'Core Essential Benefits' for food, household and personal needs . Supplemental benefits to the Core Benefits include: the Earnings Replacement Benefit where all adults are temporarily not able to work/train, the Handicap Benefit Adults assessed as severely handicapped, as defined by the AISH Act, and the Highschool Incentive where high school parents and their child(ren) are dependants on an Income Support file . The 'Core Essential Food Only' benefit has different rates for individuals requiring only food. Under the Income and Employment Supports Act the Special Diets Benefit assists with the additional special diet costs required for medical reasons.

These income supports help individuals and families gain the funds needed to buy healthy food and support other basic needs.

Educational practices are also in place in Alberta's provincial curriculum to address nutrition and food access.

The School Nutrition Program provides over 40,000 students a daily meal in participating schools.

Members of civil society in Alberta such as non-profit agencies and community groups often drive programs that provide free meals to food insecure individuals during scheduled hours in central locations . Many of these same groups publicly advocate for the human right to food (stemming from the UN), food insecurity awareness and reduction strategies.



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resource flows

Much of the information flow in this policy area originates from the Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM) that is used by Stats Canada in surveying to determine Food Security Severity . This provides an information base for the research team, PROOF, to investigate food insecurity in Canada. In 2011, the PROOF team received a grant to Tackle Health and Health Equity in Canada from the Government of Canada’s health research investment agency . With this funding PROOF publishes annual reports on household food insecurity. Community organizations such as the Edmonton Nature Club, Stan Daniels Healing Centre, Alberta Health Services and the Mustard Seed help schedule time for clients to volunteer at non-profits dealing in free food transportation and distribution . Many of these community organizations, do not receive ongoing funding for food purchases or programs because grants are given for a specific ask . Therefore, there is still a reliance on donors to contribute food, funds, and volunteer hours. An example of a top-down resource flow from government to civil society occurred in 2020 with the federal government allocating



A 3 million grant in additional funding

was given to nine non-profits across Alberta to aid this program through challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

relationships & connections

Household Food Insecurity (HFI) policy expert Dr. Lynn McIntyre is a researcher and co-investigator at PROOF and has conducted most of her research while being at the University of Calgary . Lynn’s research has been focused on influencing policy that will reduce household level food insecurity in Canada . Due to her policy recommendations in relation to HFI, Dr. McIntyre is associated with the Basic Income Canada Network . In terms of the ministerial stake in food insecurity, Adriana LaGrange, the Minister of Education, has shown her support in continuing funding for non-profits and school boards to provide meals for students in at-home learning . While there is no explicit mention of food insecurity in Jason Luan’s (Minster of Community and Social Services) departmental Business plan, close attention is paid to economic recovery in the context of the pandemic . Outcomes in the plan include increased employment participation and community inclusion through increased funding to civil society. The Advisory Agency ‘Premier’s Council on Charities and Civil Society’ is established with the mandate to engage and consult with civil society leaders to explore how to solve some of Alberta’s most pressing social issues, including food insecurity . Representing issues on food insecurity on this agency is James McAra, the CEO of the Calgary Food Bank.



100 million through the Emergency Food Security Fund

to Canadian food banks and other national food rescue organizations to aid in food insecurity caused by the pandemic . A provincial example of this resource flow was seen when the Alberta government allocated



16 million annually for the School Nutrition Program

for the 2020-21 and the 2021-22 school years.



power dynamics

The Alberta ministers, especially Jason Luan, carry a strong amount of authority and power in the realm of preventative policy related to food insecurity.

The government holds resource strength, allowing their choice of funding given to non-profit organizations and towards social assistance programs. Civil society does play an important role in providing advice to ministers such as Luan through public agencies, but final authority remains in the hands of the minister and the premier. Social and community groups have significant authority in developing and executing programs that provide free meals and other basic need resources. Funding and resources coming outside of government allow these groups to have some autonomy.

mental models

In Alberta, non-profit community groups and the NDP opposition party often represent progressive ideals in relation to food insecurity, whether it is through advocating for social assistance policies or developing aid programs. On the contrary, current conservative ideas of privatization are continually surfacing in the Community and Social Services Department, most recently in the idea to privatize respite

and residential services for disabled individuals in 2020 . Narratives of independence and individualism over collectivism are salient in Alberta’s social assistance.

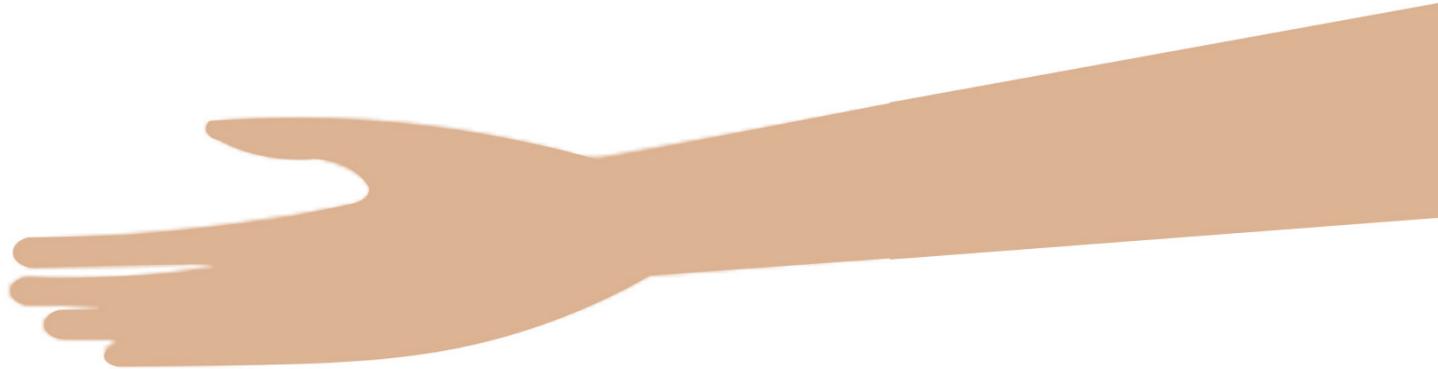
Through the public eye, Albertans often look at food insecurity as being solved by charity rather than emphasizing preventative measures.

Aspects of settler colonialism remain in Alberta as Indigenous people are disproportionately affected by food insecurity in Alberta.



It is estimated almost half of all First Nations families are food insecure .The full picture is not readily available because being excluded from the CCHS survey coverage are persons living on reserves and other Aboriginal settlements in the provinces .

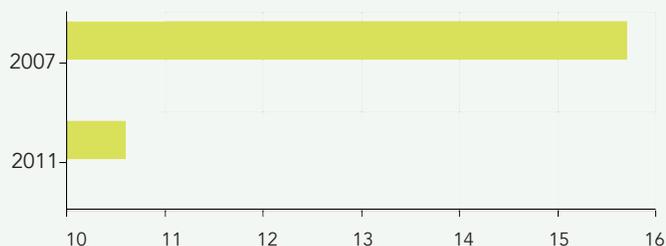
“poverty reduction strategies that involve public policy can substantially reduce food insecurity”



vignette

A 2015 study found that rates of HFI in Newfoundland declined from 15.7 to 10.6 percent between 2007 and 2011 after a comprehensive policy reduction strategy was implemented .

Household Food Insecurity Rates



This strategy was largely driven by Premier Williams. While the approach was quite liberal, Williams saw it through a conservative lens by using these government resources on poverty while cutting from other sectors when Newfoundland was in an economic boom. Many calls for a poverty strategy were bottom up as income support clients identified barriers to education and employment and community stakeholders pointed to the need to better coordinate service delivery .

The success of the strategy was in part due to the extensive community engagement and consultation process.

There was a year of consultation before the policy was implemented and they continued afterward. The non-profit sector was also involved after hearing Williams' commitment to poverty reduction with the accompanying broad-based ministerial Committee he created.

“Key aspects of the strategy include increased:

- » income support rates,
- earning exemptions,
- health benefits,
- low-income tax threshold,
- affordable housing options
- and liquid asset limits” .

Multifaceted poverty reduction strategies that involve public policy can substantially reduce food insecurity and improve the ability to meet other basic needs.