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ywcacalgary.ca

January 30, 2020

The Honourable Rajan Sawhney, Minister of Community and Social Services
224 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue NW
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Sawhney,

RE: YWCAs of Alberta 2020 Community and Social Services Budget and Red Tape Reduction

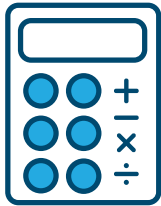
We are writing to you today to provide our view on the priorities for the upcoming 2020 Community and Social Services budget. As a collective of Alberta's largest and longest serving women's organizations, we have come together to offer provincial-scale solutions to the challenges faced by women, girls and their families in Alberta.

We know hard financial decisions must be made to secure Alberta's future, enhance our economic competitiveness and create the conditions for a socially prosperous Alberta for all. That is why; we have developed a set of budget, and red tape reduction solutions that maximize the investment targets outlined in the Ministry's 2019-2022 Business Plan to best support vulnerable Albertans. The solutions we are providing today build off of the YWCA 2019 Budget and Red Tape Reduction Submission submitted in October 2019, and more clearly articulate our key priorities related to: housing and shelter, domestic violence, income supports, evaluation, and affordable public transit.

Thank you for your consideration of our recommendations. We welcome a meeting to debrief during a budget lock-up, and explore red tape reduction solutions.

Sincerely,

Sue Tomney, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Calgary
Connie MacDonald, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Banff
Amber Niemeier, Interim Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Edmonton
Lena Neufeld, Program Director, YWCA Lethbridge



Community & Social Services Budget & Red Tape Reduction Submission

Supporting Vulnerable Albertans with Housing & Shelter

Emergency, transitional, permanent supportive housing and affordable housing **saves lives and money** for our social services, justice and healthcare systems. Albertans experiencing homelessness need access to safe shelter as soon as possible to reduce the impacts lack of housing may have on their health and wellbeing as well as the financial cost this places on our emergency responders.

In 2018, 5,700 Albertans were reported to be experiencing homelessness. Of those, **28% were women**¹. In Lethbridge, where homelessness has increased 153% from 2016 to 2018, 73% of its homeless population identifies as Indigenous – of which **76% identify as women**. Homelessness continues to be a complex problem that the YWCAs of Alberta are partners in solving in our local communities and with our provincial partners.

Budget Ask

- In partnership with the Ministry of Seniors and Housing, work to maximize the use of the Federal-Territorial Partnership through the National Housing Strategy to develop innovative models for permanent affordable housing in Alberta. Ensure that 25% of affordable housing developed is targeted towards women and their families.
- Prioritize the development of a homelessness policy vision that clearly articulate government’s mandate. The development should include consultations with service delivery organizations committed to ending, and preventing homelessness.
- Continue to invest in innovative approaches to shelter for youth, adults and seniors that meet the needs of each community.
- Continue to invest in Housing First programming. Examine potential to deliver clinical physical and mental health supports to Albertans accessing permanent supportive housing and Housing First programs.

Red Tape Reduction

- Invest the \$3.6 Million earmarked in the Ministry’s business plan to consolidate and enhance information systems. Removing the red tape that limits data sharing and analysis across the Ministry, to more strategically invest Community and Social Services dollars will ultimately help better support Albertans experiencing homelessness.
- In collaboration with cross-government partners develop a plan to remove data silos that prevent impact-analysis of homelessness investments.

¹ 7 Cities on Homelessness (2018). 7 Cities on Homelessness Technical Report. 2018 Point-In-Time Homeless Count. <https://www.7cities.ca/7-cities-pit-count>

Responding to Domestic Violence

In 2018 and 2019, over **10,000 children, adults (men and women) and seniors accessed a domestic abuse shelter in Alberta**². An additional, **7,474 Albertans were supported through outreach programs**.

The cycle of violence affects Albertans regardless of their class, gender, sex or race. However the risk factors for Albertans experiencing domestic abuse, and challenges with ending the cycle of abuse can be more complex for specific populations. Statistically we know:

- Women who are racialized newcomers are more likely to be killed by a partner than a non-racialized women ³
- Indigenous women and girls are more likely to go missing and be murdered in Alberta ⁴
- Members of the LGBTQ2S+ community experience higher rates intimate partner violence ⁵
- Underreporting of family violence persists - this includes men and boys who have been victims ⁶

With what we know now about family violence, policy and programs must shift to better respond to the needs of Albertans.

Budget Ask

- With the upcoming implementation of Clare’s Law, a new set of supports needs to be made available to Albertans who have learned of their partner’s history with domestic abuse. This includes the access to transit, basic crisis intervention, safety planning and case management.
- In collaboration with the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General, support the creation of cross-system partnerships between police and civil society organizations to address domestic abuse (i.e. the **Domestic Conflict Response Team**).
- Invest in sexual assault intervention and prevention supports. This includes support workers for Albertans have survived sexual violence and, funding to provide sexual assault prevention and awareness training in schools
- Assign dollars to complete an initial review of *Family Violence Hurts Everyone: A Framework to End Family Violence in Alberta* to ensure it reflects best practices and current government priorities. Specifically examine opportunities to shift family violence policy to better respond to the needs of Albertans who are racialized, sexually and gender diverse, and men and boys.

² Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters (2019). 2019 Data Release.

Retrieved From: https://acws.ca/collaborate-document/1677/download/ACWS_Data-Release-2019._ACWSWEB.pdf

³ Kalaichandran, Sakthi (2018). “Risk Factors for Domestic Homicide: Immigrant & Canadian-born Populations”. Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository. 5363. <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/5363>

⁴ Native Women’s Association Canada (2015). Fact Sheet: Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women and Girls.

Retrieved From: https://www.nwac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Fact_Sheet_Missing_and_Murdered_Aboriginal_Women_and_Girls.pdf

⁵ Lorenzetti, L., Wells, L., Callaghan, T., & Logie, C. (2014). Domestic violence in Alberta’s gender and sexually diverse communities: Towards a framework for prevention. Calgary, AB: The University of Calgary, Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence.

⁶ Government of Canada (2018). Family violence: How big is the problem in Canada?

Retrieved From: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/stop-family-violence/problem-canada.html>

Sustainable Income Supports

Income support programs, such as the Assured Income for Severely Handicapped (AISH) and Alberta Works (AW) provide vital social services, income and access to health care for vulnerable Albertans. These programs also represent a \$2 billion investment each year from the Community and Social Services Budget – with demand growing year-over-year.

The **sustainability of income support programs acutely affect Albertans who live in poverty – especially women and their families**. We know that **80% of single parents are women – of single parent families 1 in 6 children experience poverty**⁷. As the need for income assistance increases in correlation with the persistent recession, the need for an income supports model that meets the needs of Albertans today is even more pressing⁸.

Budget Ask

- Establish a panel comprised of a cross-sector of persons with lived experience, researchers and policy makers that reviews Assured Income for Severely Handicapped and Alberta Works to examine ways to provide adequate income supports to vulnerable Albertans. Attached in the appendix is a draft Terms of Reference for the AISH and AW Panel.

Red Tape Reduction

- Gather the lived experience of Albertans who have accessed AISH and AW to inform the reduction of red tape.
- Eliminate the asset eligibility requirement in order to more easily access the 'Escaping Domestic Abuse Benefit' and 'Damage Deposit Benefit' supports from AW.
- Increase the earned income limits for AW clients so Albertans can earn income above the poverty line without losing their benefits.
- Align the core shelter benefit in AW with the rates provided through the Rent Supplement Program.
- Ensure any Community and Social Services supports accessed by someone who is identified as experiencing human trafficking (i.e. Alberta Works) are expedited.

⁷ Women's Centre of Calgary (2018). Fact Facts: Women and Poverty. Retrieved From: <https://www.womenscentrecalgary.org/fast-facts/>

⁸ Wilkins, Margarita (2019). Percentage of Alberta and Ontario Households Reliant on Social Assistance. School of Public Policy. Retrieved From: <https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Social-Policy-Trends-AB-ON-Social-Assistance-by-Households-October-9-2019.pdf>

Standardized Measurement: Evaluating Prevention

YWCA's across Alberta touch the lives of women and their families across their life span – we see the positive impact that social services have on Albertans every day. **Experts have long called for the use of prevention through the implementation of social services as a way to achieve better health outcomes**⁹. Social supports include housing and access to healthy food, cultural and religious services, social and psychological supports, and recreation. In the long term, Albertans that are able to meet their basic needs are healthier, more resilient, and reduce their use of public health care.

Budget Ask

- Develop a standardized measurement of the impacts of social services programs on the quality of life Albertans.

Red Tape Reduction

- Standardize evaluation of social services programs so they all measure their impact on the quality of life of Albertans.

Human Trafficking in the Shelter System

Systems change is required to bring light to the critical issue of human trafficking. Prevention of human trafficking begins with raising awareness of the dire nature of this issue, legislative change and funding prioritized to combat this problem. The **women that access the emergency shelters at YWCAs in Alberta are particularly vulnerable for being trafficked** because they are experiencing complex financial, social and emotional barriers.

Budget Ask

- Provide dedicated funding for training in shelters (emergency and domestic violence) for recognizing the signs of human trafficking.

Red Tape Reduction

- Ensure any Community and Social Services supports accessed by someone who is identified as experiencing human trafficking (i.e. Alberta Works) are expedited.

⁹ Sinclair, Duncan; Walker, David; Simpson, Chris; and Drummond, Don (2019). Intelligence Memo: Getting to A People-Centred Health System. Retrieved From: <https://www.cdhowe.org/intelligence-memos/sinclair-walker-simpson-drummond-%E2%80%93-getting-people-centred-health-system>

Access to Public Transit

The Alberta government's support of the **fair-access program** has been critical to YWCA's clients who regularly use **public transit to get to work**, school or health appointments. Continued support of this successful program is critical to building strong and safe communities.

Budget Ask

- Invest the \$9.5 million identified in the Ministry's Business Plan in the Fair Access Program to ensure all Albertans have equal access to amenities in Edmonton and Calgary. Enshrine this investment as a permanent investment across the province.

AISH and AW Review Panel Terms of Reference

The following draft was created by the YWCAs of Alberta and is a suggested model for an AISH and AW Review Panel

Background

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) and Alberta Works (AW) account for nearly \$2 billion for supports and administrative costs from the Ministry of Community and Social Services budget. More recently, the Ministry of Community and Social Services has moved to no longer index the rates of AISH and AW to inflation – saving \$300 million.

The challenge before us:

The caseloads for AISH and AW programs have consistently been increasing. This is in part a result of weak economic conditions that do not provide Albertans viable income to live sustainably without government supports. The December 2019 Auditor General report identified that there has been a 44% increase in the average caseload in AW alone. The Report called for improvements to eligibility verification; client file assessments and service plan; monitoring of client files and reporting on program effectiveness.

Best practices to draw from:

In October 2012, the Government of Ontario released a report from the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario. The Report was a result of an in depth review, and series of consultations with Ontarians on the effectiveness of the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Ontario Works (OW). One recommendation suggested that a cost savings \$140 million per annum could result from program integration efforts.

The opportunity to rise to the challenge:

Alberta's income supports policy is at a pivot point – Albertans needs are increasingly more complex and their opportunities to achieve economic independence are changing. An income support system for Albertans is still critically needed both for its financial and well-being supports. An ingenious solution is required to ensure Albertans are able to receive the income supports when they are needed most while balancing fiscal responsibility. Albertans have the solution to these challenges – it is a matter of facilitating a strategic conversation on the most appropriate solution.

AISH and AW Review Panel Terms of Reference

PURPOSE OF AISH & AW PANEL

Assured Income for Severely Handicapped (AISH) and Alberta Works (AW) to identify policy sustainable solutions to adequately support Albertans in need of income supports.

ACCOUNTABILITY

- The Panel is responsible to the Minister of Community and Social Services.

IN SCOPE OBJECTIVES

- Review research related to the impacts on Albertans receiving of AISH and AW post de-indexation.
- Examine opportunities to remove bureaucratic red-tape that can improve the client experience of Albertans receiving AISH and AW.
- Identify opportunities to reduce administration costs of AISH and AW that would enhance service delivery.
- Develop legislative, regulatory and policy recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of AISH and AW to support Albertans.

OUT OF SCOPE

- Federally funded and delivered programs (i.e. Employment Insurance)
- Municipally funded programming for vulnerable Albertans
- Social assistance programs for youth under age 18

PANEL TIMELINE

- April 2020 to March 2022

MEMBERSHIP

- Albertans with lived-experience receiving social assistance X 4
- Research experts in Social Assistance X 2
- Policy experts in Social Assistance X 2
- Representatives Civil Society organizations serving vulnerable Albertans X 3
- Additional representatives may become members at the discretion of the Chair and membership.

AISH and AW Review Panel Terms of Reference

STRUCTURE

ROLES

- Chair (Civil Society Representative appointed by the Minister)
- Vice Chair (Public Service Representative appointed by the Minister)
- Chair for Persons with Lived Experience
- Chair for Strategic Research and Policy Recommendations
- General Membership

SUB-COMMITTEE: PERSONS WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

Sub-committee: Persons with Lived Experience

- Chair for Persons with Lived Experience
- Vice Chair Persons with Lived Experience
- General Members who are Persons with Lived Experience
- Additional members as required and approved by the membership of the Sub-committee.

SUB-COMMITTEE: RESEARCH & INNOVATION

- Chair for Strategic Research and Policy Recommendations
- General Membership
- Additional members as required and approved by the membership of the Sub-committee.

DELIVERABLE

- Bi-annual progress reports
- Final recommendation report for Minister of Community & Social Services

FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS

- Bi-monthly meetings
- Ad-hoc meetings determined as needed.

