

Issue Proposals - Calgary Alliance for the Common Good – May 25, 2020 Assembly

Preamble

Over the past year, the Research Action Teams worked to understand key community issues identified from last year's listening campaign, preparing recommendations for the Assembly. COVID19 created a situation for the Alliance to consider implications for vulnerable populations requiring community organizing as well as advocacy. The following issue proposals are a result of considerations for immediate action as well as ongoing, longer-term advocacy proposals.

Short-term COVID-19 action proposals:

We have been listening to our communities for emerging issues. Three areas of focus are:

1. Canada Implement a **Guaranteed Annual Income**

Issue: A monthly income be provided to people whose income falls below the level to maintain a stable, healthy life (a specific amount will need to be developed).

Why: The government's response to COVID19 has shown the problems with a patch work approach to social supports. Most importantly it provides flexibility and avoids stigma so that people can avoid getting stuck in a poverty cycle.

Winnable? Those who work in poverty have recommended a basic income as essential for addressing poverty. The sudden loss of income experienced by many during COVID and the apparent problems with a patchwork approach have started a public conversation that has created the best opportunity yet to have basic income become a reality.

2. Access to Technology

Issues:

- a. Access to Computers for low-income families
- b. Access to free/affordable internet for people with low-income

Why: From our listening during COVID19, we have heard that a lack of access to communication technology has been a significant barrier to accessing supports, education, social connections and health care.

Winnable? We are working with a broad coalition, including the City of Calgary, to identify needs and solutions. The need is clear, and organizations have been relatively responsive.

3. Housing/Transit

Issues:

- a. People who are homeless have a warm and dry place to be during the day.
- b. Stimulus money be spent on affordable housing.

Why: During COVID19 it became apparent that having homeless people congregated in shelters is a public health risk for everyone. When previous places where homeless people gathered to stay warm and dry were closed, people experiencing homelessness moved onto transit now causing challenges on transit. The underlying need is that people need homes as it is less costly to house a person (approx. \$40,000 per year) then support someone on the streets (\$100,000).

Winnable? We are already in conversations with the City of Calgary about having places for people experiencing homelessness to be during the day. From these conversations, it is clear funding for affordable housing is a potential ask for upcoming stimulus spending.

Ongoing, Longer-term Issues and Proposals

Mental Health Team Recommendations

Early Intervention and Prevention – [Turning the Tide in one Generation](#)

Issue: Provide sustainable funding for every elementary school to have a full-time mental health coordinator to fulfill the following mandate:

- Ensure every student receives the most beneficial psycho-educational assessments for classroom support in a timely manner
- Coordinate holistic and community-oriented mental health strategies for the benefit of families, students and staff
- Oversee the successful training of all school staff in evidence-based mental health pedagogy and trauma-informed practice

Why: Early intervention is critical to reduce demands on our system. Research indicates that up to 70 per cent of young adults living with mental health problems report symptoms started in childhood. Intervention early in life brings significant return on investment reducing demand for services in the mental health system and other sectors, such as the criminal justice system. The most effective strategies take a holistic community-based approach to mental health, with a clear focus on prevention. Looking at our societal structures, it is evident that our local schools are best situated to support such initiatives. In fact, researchers believe the “development of the school as a site for the effective delivery of mental health services is essential”.

Winnable? COVID19 has illuminated and increased mental health challenges in our families and children. We have heard that the provincial mental health strategy will emphasis early intervention. We also have allies in both the Catholic and Public-school systems. Examples exist in Calgary about the effectiveness of this proposal. This focus would be the initial primary focus of our mental health work.

[Mobile Response Team](#)

Increase the Mobile Response Team (MRT) and PACT capacity, to provide outreach services 24/7 (instead of current 9:30am-9:30pm) in the Calgary area.

Why: People face mental health challenges at all hours of the day, therefore services should be available at all hours of the day. During the COVID-19 pandemic, health resources are on a crisis footing, with the ensuing/increased anxiety and trauma making distributed mental health services necessary. Providing comprehensive outreach services in our communities can help mitigate stress, not to mention save lives through suicide prevention.

Winnable? We estimate that a mobile response in the community would cost less on average than a mental health crisis being responded to in the emergency department at a hospital. E.g. Remote video linkage protects both parties. Our research found there is a wide range of both community and organizational support in Calgary already. AHS has recently received increased funding which we believe need to be allocated to MRT by acting quickly

Trauma Informed Care Initiative

Ask that the government of Alberta to adopt Trauma-Informed Care practices across all appropriate departments and agencies.

Why: Trauma places an enormous burden on every health care and human service system (*including our own organizations*). Trauma-informed care asks the question, “what has happened to you?” versus “what is wrong with you?”. Trauma-informed care recognizes the effects of intergenerational trauma on our indigenous peoples and can provide critical understanding for refugees and immigrants. It also recognizes the link between trauma and social isolation, poverty, mental illness and other poor outcomes at an individual, community, and national level. A variety of studies show the approach has the following positive results:

- It produces statistically better outcomes for those suffering with mental illness
- Agencies can deliver the care without increasing costs of program delivery
- The governments of BC and Delaware have proven this approach works
- Supports the call to action for the Truth and Reconciliation Research Action Team proposal

Winnable? The provincial government is implementing a Mental Health and Addictions Strategy indicating we are in a mental health crisis in this province. Already there is a Trauma Informed Collective working on these issues that would welcome our support.

Social Isolation and Building Inclusive Communities

Issue: Funding for important social infrastructure including libraries, recreation centre, community social works and public transit, at a minimum be maintained.

Why: Calgary has existing social infrastructure that is essential for overcoming social isolation and building inclusive communities. We are currently in a challenging time in which we have already seen strong political pressure towards austerity and cutting this important social infrastructure. As we come out of COVID19, this infrastructure will be essential for healing/reconnecting our communities.

Winnable? Through the *#KeepCalgaryStrong* campaign, we have seen that people will be mobilized to protect these community resources. Many powerful stories exist explaining why these resources are important in people’s lives. We have also seen political leaders respond positively to our actions in these areas.

Internal Organizing - Social Isolation & Mental Health Campaign

Jointly with the Mental Health Research Action Team, we are proposing an internal organizing campaign that is aimed at reaching out to people who are experiencing mental health and social isolation. This will involve building teams within our institutions and training them to reach out to people who are isolated in our communities and institutions. These teams will be equipped with basic mental health support training such as the Mental Health First Aid or The AHS’s Community Helper program. This is being carried out as a part of our COVID-19 response.

Environment Team - [Green Stimulus Campaign](#)

Issue: As government invests to kickstart the economy after the COVID19 crisis, that investment needs to be used to shift us towards a just and environmentally sustainable economy. The specific focuses will be:

- The four new capital buildings the City has committed to building be net-zero emission and adopts Top-of-Class Green Building Certification and Standards. (These are: The Event Centre to replace the Saddledome; an expansion of the BMO Centre; Arts Commons; and the Foothills Fieldhouse)
- Investments be made to increase the quality and affordability of our transit system (Green Line and completing our primary transit network) to make transit the most attractive and affordable option to get around as we return to work

Why: We are at a time where the shift to a sustainable economy is critical if we are to avoid the worst effects of climate change and ensure social inclusiveness. With the expected economic stimulus spending there is an opportunity to shift our economy to a more just and sustainable path.

Winnable? The City of Calgary already has committed to building the four major capital projects and is currently determining the standards they should comply with. The City is already working both to secure funding for the Greenline and as adopted the Route Ahead strategy that commit to implementing a primary transit network. A strong public support for these projects can ensure that stimulus funding will be directed to fund these projects. The discussions around the Low-Income Transit Pass in the last budget cycle also showed a shift in tone, with councillors beginning to treat transit as more of an essential service. Similarly, the City's Sustainable Building Policy has already moved in the right direction to ensure City-owned buildings contribute to reducing emissions and waste. It is time to take the next step. Together, these initiatives will help demonstrate to investors that Calgary is serious about acting on climate change.

Truth and Reconciliation Team – [Aboriginal Liaison Officer](#)

Issue: Calgary Police Services needs an Aboriginal Liaison Officer for each of its district offices.

Why: Over policing and under protection are considered key issues underlying missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Vital to addressing this, is assisting the police develop better cultural competencies, understanding of the impacts of colonization and better relationships with indigenous communities. The factor that can shift this is to ensure that each district office has an indigenous liaison officer. Currently there is only one Indigenous Liaison officer in a city of 1.2M which is inadequate.

Winnable? The Calgary Police Service has already committed to building and maintaining partnerships with all Aboriginal communities in Calgary. The current CPS Aboriginal Liaison Officer is indigenous and would be an ally and resource for the committee members. Having the Aboriginal Liaison Officer build relationships with all visible minorities would be in line with the CPS community partnership objective.