

Keep Alberta Strong

The Honourable Jason Kenney, MLA
Premier of Alberta, President of Executive Council
Minister of Intergovernmental Relations
Office of the Premier
307 Legislature Building
10800 – 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

August 16, 2019

Dear Premier Kenney:

We are writing to you as *Keep Alberta Strong*, a growing coalition of organizations from across Alberta committed to ensuring all Albertans have access to the opportunities and resources they need to contribute to our province's economic prosperity.

We respect the difficult choices your government is facing as it works to bring balance back to Alberta's finances and appreciate the level of rigour you are applying to the development of the fall budget. This approach is both commendable and necessary. Additionally, we are fully supportive of your government's main priorities of getting Albertans back to work and making life better. The upcoming budget is a key opportunity to invest in this vision.

Many of our organizations work with or provide front-line services to vulnerable Albertans and the working poor. As a result, we have a first-hand understanding of both the economic and the social benefits of key programs and services—not only for those who access them but for all of us. As you develop the fall budget, we ask you to continue to invest in six priority areas, all of which support your government's key priorities:

1. The Alberta Child Benefit (ACB)

- The ACB provides direct financial assistance to over 100,000 families (over 300,000 children) with lower household incomes.
- Since the ACB was introduced, Alberta's child poverty rate has declined by 50%.
- Fewer children living in poverty now leads to more independent and economically prosperous adults in the future.
- In our experience, the ACB has also been an economic stabilizer for families and has enabled many to pursue and maintain better jobs.

2. Affordable transportation

- Access to affordable transportation is a proven strategy for enabling economic participation and improving quality of life, particularly for the working poor. Rural municipalities face unique transit challenges, and there is a demand for local-provincial partnership solutions to address this.
- In recent years, the Government of Alberta has partnered with Calgary and Edmonton to make public transit more affordable. In both Calgary and Edmonton, this funding has made possible a sliding scale fare structure for the low-income transit pass. The pass was purchased by 60,000

Calgarians and over 40,000 Edmontonians in 2018, many of whom reported better access to education, jobs, and other opportunities as a result.

- In rural Alberta, six two-year projects in various locations across the province have received funding through the Rural Transportation Pilot Program. These grants are supporting transit services for nearly 150,000 Albertans.

3. Family and Community Support Services (FCSS)

- FCSS is a funding partnership between the Government of Alberta and participating municipalities. The current provincial investment is \$101 million annually, which was less than 0.18% of the total budget in 2018.
- FCSS programs are locally driven and delivered initiatives that are focused on prevention, and which promote well-being, resilience, and active participation in the community. They help individuals overcome poverty and achieve greater financial stability.
- For each dollar invested in 2018 by the City of Calgary, \$8.58 was leveraged in the community.
- Research also shows that for every dollar invested in preventative services, \$7-\$12 is saved in future spending—specifically in the areas of justice, health, and addictions.

4. Affordable, quality childcare

- Increasing access to affordable childcare is vital to advancing gender equality and addressing barriers to women's economic participation, both of which are Government of Alberta priorities.
- Affordable childcare opens up economic opportunities for women, enabling them to find and keep work, start their own businesses, move beyond poverty, and gain independence.
- In Alberta, childcare is difficult to access (there are only enough regulated spaces for one in three children below the age of five) and unaffordable (the average monthly fee for a toddler in Calgary is \$1,030).
- It is estimated that advancing gender equality has the potential to add \$150 billion in incremental GDP to the Canadian economy by 2026.

5. Social assistance rates

- Income Support and Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) rates were recently increased and indexed to inflation (to account for year-over-year changes to the cost of living).
- These important changes have already increased the financial stability of many low-income Albertans, including persons living with a disability.

6. Affordable Housing

- In Alberta, more than 164,000 households are in core housing need (spending 30% or more of total before-tax income to pay for housing), according to the 2016 Census.
- The 2018 Point in Time Count found 5,735 Albertans to be experiencing homelessness.
- Affordable housing saves money. Building affordable housing requires investment (\$5,000 to \$8,000 per year) but maintaining the status quo costs versus spending up to \$100,000 per person per year in emergency room expenses, law enforcement, and other services.
- Investing in affordable housing is an opportunity to fulfill the Alberta government's commitment to invest \$1.2 billion to provide 4,100 new or renewed affordable housing units in the next three years.
- Supporting affordable housing developments is an investment.
- According to the Government of Alberta's economic multiplier analysis, every \$1 invested in building affordable housing creates \$1.74 in total economic output.

The consequences of poverty and economic exclusion are well-documented, both in terms of the economic cost to our province (at least \$7 billion each year) and the impact on our social fabric. This is why maintaining investments in programs and initiatives that support vulnerable Albertans and the working poor is vital to ensuring Alberta's prosperity. As discussions continue in advance of the fall budget, we would welcome any opportunity to discuss the above priorities with you or to provide additional feedback. Thank you for the difficult work you and your government are doing to create a new economic plan for Alberta.

Sincerely,

Keep Alberta Strong

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c.c: Honourable Travis Toews, President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
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Honourable Leela Aheer, Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women

