

Recommendations for Economic Recovery

June 11, 2020

**To: The Alberta Economic Recovery Council
c/o: Dr. Jack Mintz, Chair**

Dear Council Members,

The YWCAs of Alberta have been supporting women, children and their families since 1907. With operations located in Banff, Calgary, Edmonton and Lethbridge, we have worked in our communities to ensure families thrive during economic highs and weather the lows.

Our experience with the Spanish Influenza in 1919 holds wisdom for us today. As illness rates amongst Albertans rose, the more difficult it was for the economy to rebound. Today we are seeing eerie parallels to this past pandemic with women and their children made more vulnerable by this public health crisis. That is why Alberta's swift response to COVID-19 has been so critical. It has been diligent and deliberate with many Albertans working to flatten the curve, allowing us to weather this storm effectively. As we move through the phases of relaunch, we can now look to longer term economic recovery efforts.

The YWCAs of Alberta together support over 30,000 women, children and their families in rural and urban communities with childcare, disability supports, domestic violence counselling and shelter, emergency and permanent housing, fitness, language instruction for newcomers, and mental health counselling. This is why we are keenly interested in using our expertise to shift the paradigm of economic policy, as our sector is often a connector, facilitator and healer during difficult times. The following recommendations were formulated after extensive review of evidence-based research and consulting with industry experts including Calgary Economic Development, Calgary Chamber of Commerce, the Alberta Women and Science Network, YMCA Northern Alberta and policy makers at the municipal, provincial and federal levels.

We believe a strong economic recovery strategy must focus on removing barriers to participation in the workforce. This means taking steps to ensure a robust childcare sector, diversity in Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM)-based sectors, appropriate support for essential frontline workers (i.e. frontline healthcare, senior's care, and emergency shelter), a clear plan to for municipal governments to survive this difficult time, communications that promote a safe and inclusive Alberta and addressing the resiliency of the civil society sector. What underlies all of our following recommendation is our hope that at all decision-making tables that women and gender diverse persons are represented equally – so they to can lead and participate in Alberta's economic recovery. Ensuring women and gender diverse persons are actively contributing to our economic recovery strategies will result in effective solutions that have a higher chance of being impactful and achieving long-term prosperity for all Albertans.



Recommendations for Economic Recovery

We want to see the livelihoods of Alberta’s women, children and their families be sustainable and successful for the long-term. This notion connects deeply to Alberta’s history as an agricultural-based economy. Christian Theologian and Scholar, Ellen F. Davis, speaks to this notion of sustainability when she says “Agrarians are committed to preserving both communities and the material means of life, to cultivating practices that ensure that the essential means of life suffice for all members of the present generation and are not diminished for those who come after.” It is this notion of sustainable livelihoods that underlies our recommendations and our intention to collaborate in creating a sustainable, and thriving economy for Alberta.

Our hope is to see an Alberta resilient, strong and inclusive for many years to come.

If you would like further information or to discuss our recommendations, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us directly by contacting:

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Best Regards,

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Recommendations for Economic Recovery



Securing the Future of Alberta Families: Economic Recovery

Recommendations for Economic Recovery

1. Assemble a *Childcare Task Force* to envision an integrated childcare system for accessible, affordable, flexible and quality childcare for families with children aged 0 to 14.

In Alberta, there are over 815,000 children aged 0 to 14 who's families may require childcare, with this segment growing to over 1 million by 2047². As a result of shifts in service due to the pandemic and subsequent closure of many facilities, this critical sector is struggling to survive while Alberta's demand for this service will continue to grow for years to come. It is also important to note, this sector is predominantly employs women and they have been deeply impacted by temporary and permanent closures of child care centres across this province.

Keeping the childcare industry whole will ensure Albertans can return to work with peace of mind that their children are safe and well cared for.

Key Issues

The key strategic issues the *Childcare Task Force* should address are:

- An integrated and sustainable childcare sector that is characterized by a robust continuum of care from ages 0 to 14;
- Setting measurable goals for quality childcare delivery as per the upcoming review and updates of the *Childcare Licensing Act*;
- Accessible and flexible childcare for children (aged 0 to 14) and families; and
- Affordability of childcare for Alberta's families who need it most.

We are encouraged by the steps taken by the Province to provide essential financing to the childcare sector, as it reflects best practices for economic recovery³. Alberta currently has a record-high number of jobless households who cannot afford childcare and reap the benefits of these developmentally enriching programs⁴. Many may not be able to afford it even once they return to work – meaning the demand for childcare made affordable through subsidies will increase. Accessibility and affordability of childcare is a critical barrier for single or working mothers to accessing work that is sustainable and financially rewarding⁵. Moreover, should parents choose not to access childcare, children may be unable to benefit from the developmental opportunities of early childhood education. This current disruption in childcare delivery could have long-term impacts on the development of Alberta's children and the resiliency of our families.

² Government of Alberta. Alberta population projections 2019-2046 Retrieved from: <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/45d8dc72-58d7-4b92-b3e6-589cf1869233/resource/fce811e9-c93a-42cb-a64c-6a93e77489e0/download/alberta-population-projections-infographic-2019-2046.pdf>

³ COVID-19 Crisis Business Continuity and Trade Working Group (2020). Communique #6: For resilient re-opening, test, trace and target support. Retrieved From: https://www.cdhowe.org/sites/default/files/attachments/communiques/mixed/CWGR_2020_0504.pdf

⁴ Statistics Canada (2020). Labour Force Survey, April 2020. Retrieved From: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200508/dq200508a-eng.htm>

⁵ Bjarnason, A. D. (2018). A Space of their Own? A feminist exploration of gendered spatial relations in Professional Women's Organizations in Alberta's Resource Sector. (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Calgary, Calgary, AB. doi:10.11575/PRISM/31933 <http://hdl.handle.net/1880/106662> master thesis

Recommendations for Economic Recovery

2. Develop a strategy to attract and retain a gender-diverse workforce in Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) jobs.

High calibre talent and economic recovery are dependent on one another – Alberta has an opportunity to further enhance its role as a leader in STEM while ensuring women and gender diverse people have a real chance at success in these sectors. Put simply, gender diversity in the workforce is good economic policy as a gender diverse labour force has the potential to increase revenues by \$150 billion by 2026 in Canada alone ⁶. Additional benefits include increasing the financial performance of an organization, providing access to more talent, strengthening innovation and improving governance ⁷.

Alberta's 2020 Budget made a powerful statement with its title: A Blueprint for Jobs. Foundational to this budget was ensuring a thriving economy that created sustainable employment for Albertans for years to come. As per Alberta's most recent job statistics report, there was 380,000 fewer jobs in April 2020 than in April 2019 ⁸. These unprecedented job losses are concerning and even more so is the harsh impact it has had on young women, 45% of whom have lost jobs since the beginning of February ⁹.

Alberta has long been a leader in Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)-based sectors, boasting some of the most innovative and clean oil and gas extraction practices, a world-leading agriculture sector, an entrepreneurial spirit that drives tech innovation and some of Canada's largest renewable energy projects. Jobs in STEM are well paying, stable and position Alberta to continue to be a leader. However, statistics show these jobs are not equally accessed by women and gender diverse peoples.

Together in partnership with industry associations, education institutions, the business community and the civil society sector, this strategy would address:

Attraction

- Programming and communications that promote the education of children about STEM careers beginning with kindergarten all the way through secondary and post-secondary education; and
- Communications that promote STEM careers as a job of choice for women and gender diverse peoples.

Retention

- Promote safe and inclusive workplaces for women and gender diverse peoples;
- Design and implement a well-coordinated childcare system; and
- Incentivize workplaces that promote work-life balance.

⁶ Devillard, Sandrine; Vogel, Tiffany; Pickersgill, Andrew; Madgavakar, Anu; Nowski, Tracy; Krishnan, Mekala; Pan, Tina; & Kechrid, Dania (2017). *The Power of Parity: Advancing Women's Equality in Canada*. Retrieved From: <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Featured%20Insights/Women%20matter/The%20power%20of%20parity%20Advancing%20womens%20equality%20in%20Canada/MGI-The-power-of-parity-Advancing-womens-equality-in-Canada-Full-report.ashx>

⁷ West Cost Women in Technology. 'Why Gender Diversity'. Retrieved From: <http://www.sfu.ca/wwest/resources/industry-resources.html>

⁸ Government of Alberta, Ministry of Labour and Immigration (2020). *Labour Force Statistics: April 2020*. Retrieved From: <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/c611ea4c-f12a-43c5-ab26-e135ba296aa7/resource/367a60c0-1cee-4080-a82b-83450f78c57a/download/lbr-alberta-highlights-2020-04.pdf>

⁹ Joannu, Ashley and, Cook, Dustin. May 9, 2020. *Alberta's unemployment rate rises to 13 per cent in April amid COVID-19 pandemic*. Edmonton Journal. Retrieved From: <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/alberta-unemployment-april-2020-covid-19/>

3. Make permanent pay top-ups for frontline professionals who work with persons with disabilities, the elderly, those experiencing domestic violence and homelessness.

Research from the Spanish Influenza in 1919 showed that countries with higher rates of illness experienced a longer economic re-start ¹⁰. This finding is in alignment with the goals outlined in the letter from Canada's Premiers Council regarding shared principles on reopening the economy as it prioritizes the operation and function of health care systems.

After the trades, the health care and social assistance sector is the largest employer of Albertans and 87% of its labour force are women. The most recent announcement to provide top-up pay to frontline healthcare workers is crucial – and we commend the Provincial government's efforts to implement this so swiftly.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Alberta YWCAs along with its civil society partners continued to deliver their housing, and shelter services in rural and urban communities. The workers in these frontline roles have the most potential for exposure to COVID-19 including custodians, shelter staff and childcare workers. Increasing the wages of Albertans who do this high-risk and high-demand work will attract people to the sector to ensure it remains whole, while providing Albertans more dollars to contribute to the economy. A motivated and well-supported frontline workforce will more effectively stop the spread of COVID-19 in its tracks while allowing those who do this critical work to feel valued and motivated.

¹⁰ Gelaso, Vincent (2020). The Lessons to be learned from past pandemics. Ideas for a More Prosperous Society. Retrieved From: <https://www.iedm.org/the-lessons-to-be-learned-from-past-pandemics/>

4. In collaboration with the Federal government, create a short-term operational financing and long-term capital plan to ensure municipalities can be sustainable while experiencing significant revenue shortfalls.

Alberta's families have come to enjoy a high quality of life thanks to their robust municipal services and infrastructure, and without a clear operational financing and capital plan to invest in these business lines municipalities are faced with a daunting decision to introduce sharp increases in revenue generating tools (i.e. taxation). Alberta's families will ultimately shoulder the burden of these costs – with the potential of soaring municipal residential and business taxes to make up for these significant shortfalls.

Ultimately, a set of sustainably supported municipal governments will differentiate Alberta as an attractive, and stable place for investors wanting to locate their operations, and families looking for an affordable and safe community to grow in. Alberta's families are going to be at higher risk of mental health issues, poverty, homelessness and domestic abuse so ensuring municipalities are resourced to manage, and respond to their needs on the ground will be a **crucial prevention measure** as we recover. Helping maintain services, and preventing taxes from being raised unsustainably will provide the stability Alberta's families need to stay in their homes, feed their families and stay in Alberta.

In the long term, this recommended measure will serve to attract more families to Alberta's world-class communities, which means our economy will have the labour force it needs to succeed, that Alberta's tax revenues continue to rise for the long term and that we are able to secure more political influence on the national stage as our population grows.

5. Deliver a short term communications strategy that promotes Alberta as a safe and inclusive province that specifically targets positive messages about racial inclusion and the prevention of domestic abuse.

The rationale for supporting this recommendation is simple: We must make it known to Albertans and the world that we are welcoming of all, and a safe place to call home – this is our competitive advantage. A communication strategy that targets the areas of racial inclusion and preventing domestic violence is a critical prevention measure, we start to heal from the impacts of COVID-19 and economic downturn. Evidence shows that following a serious event, such as a pandemic, citizens experience increased hostility, disillusionment and mental health issues that can lead to more aggressive displays of anger, and violence towards vulnerable groups such as racialized persons, and women and gender diverse people.

By employing this communication strategy, we would ensure Albertans know where to turn for justice, social, and housing supports if they are experiencing racial discrimination, or domestic abuse, while also promoting the view that Alberta is an inclusive and safe community.



6. Through the leadership of the Premier's Council on Charities and Civil Society consult with non-profit and charity organizations to develop a sector resiliency plan.

The civil society sector is facing its most significant threat to its survival in recent history – with millions of dollars lost from fund development, and closing of social enterprises we are now more than ever reliant on the support of government partners to ensure our essential programs can survive.

The Government of Alberta's efforts to ensure the civil society sector survives during this time has been critical this includes the \$60 million for programs and services and cost-matching for donations to designated foundations.

Challenges

In the long term the sector is faced with the following challenges:

- Elimination or consolidation of services, and organizations;
- New limitations on how, and how much money can be generated from social enterprise; and
- Higher competitiveness for funder dollars including government and private foundations.

Resiliency

Key components of a sector resiliency plan would include:

- A clear framework, and definition of civil society in Alberta;
- Guidance and support on how to align programming, and organizations;
- Red tape reduction solutions that reduce the administrative burden faced by non-profit and charitable organizations;
- Cross-Ministry approach to data collection and requests for information from civil society partners; and
- Principles for how government will procure services from civil society that is sustainable, and equitable.

