

Why some businesses are paying staff a living wage, not just the minimum

Advocacy groups say there's a big gap between minimum wage and the true cost of living.

At Massy Books in Vancouver, staff get sick days, benefits and wages that are based on the cost of living in one of the country's most expensive cities.

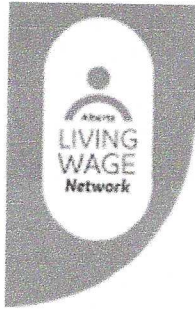
"I'm responsible for paying somebody a wage that's going to allow them to pay their bills and to support their families," said Patricia Massy, proprietor of the Indigenous owned-and-operated bookstore, which specializes in the works of underrepresented authors.

Massy Books is one of a growing number of businesses and organizations signing on to become what's known as living wage employers — committing to paying wages corresponding to the costs of things like rent, food, transportation and child care in the region where they live.

The store was recently certified by Living Wages for Families BC, one of several advocacy groups across Canada pushing for a living wage. There are similar groups in Alberta and Ontario — and a spokesperson with the Ontario Living Wage Network says more than 400 businesses and organizations in the province have committed to paying more than minimum wage.

"Employers want to know that they're not holding their employees in working poverty," Craig Pickthorne said.

- From CBC Business



What is a Living Wage?

Living wages are rooted in the belief that individuals and families should not just survive, but be able to live in dignity, and participate in their community.

Living Wages in your Community

After months of collaboration, the Alberta Living Wage Network has developed a standard methodology for calculating living wages across the province.

A living wage is the hourly wage a worker needs to earn to cover their basic expenses and participate in their community.

Note that the following living wage rates do not include extras such as benefits, perks, and paid time off (above the legislated minimum). An employer is eligible for certification if the base pay plus the value of extras is equal to or greater than the listed rate for their community. Note that the listed rates are based on a family of four, except for Cochrane, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, and Rocky Mountain House, which are based on the weighted average of a family of four and a single individual.

2021 Living Wages

- Calgary: \$18.60

- Canmore: \$37.40 (a)
- Chestermere: \$18.60
- Cochrane: \$21.00 (b)
- Drayton Valley: \$15.50
- Drumheller: \$19.70
- Edmonton: \$18.10
- Grande Prairie: \$19.45
- Fort McMurray: \$26.50 (c)
- Lethbridge \$19.00
- Red Deer \$17.15
- Rocky Mountain House \$18.05
- Stony Plain: \$17.20
- Strathcona County: \$16.80

For more information check out detailed calculations by municipality.

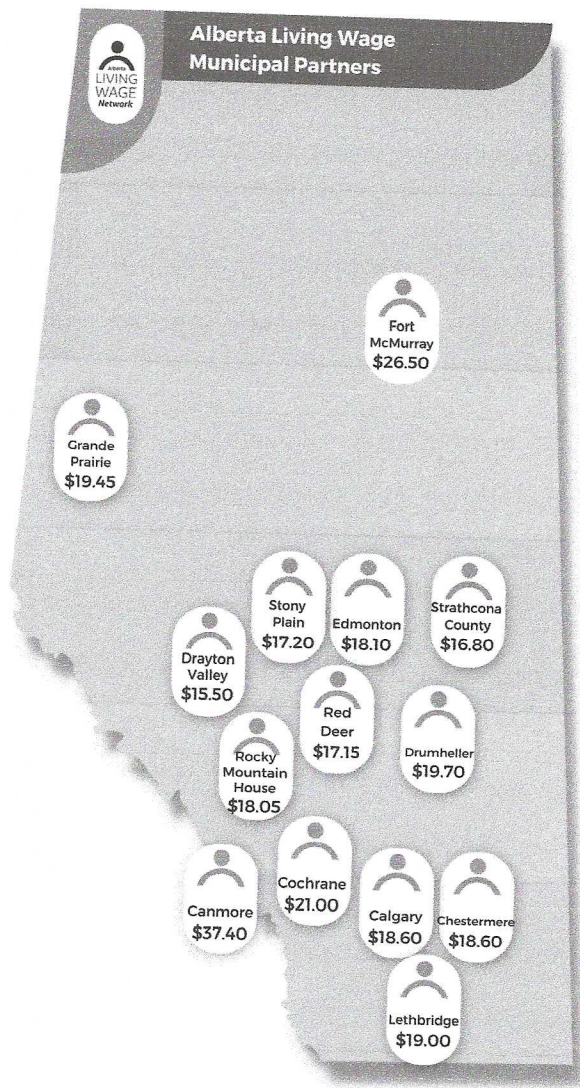
(a) Special eligibility criteria for living wage certification in Canmore:

Employer must pay at least \$23.70 (the wage needed for a single individual to cover expenses) to all employees, and the average wage of all employees must be at least \$28.55 (the weighted average between the single individual wage and the family of four wage)

(b) Amended on August 15, 2022 to the weighted average of the wage needed for a family of four and a single individual living alone. Special eligibility criteria for living wage certification in Cochrane: Employer must pay at least \$20.15 (the wage needed for a single individual to cover expenses) to all employees, and the average wage of all employees must be at least \$21.00 (the weighted average between the single individual wage and the family of four wage)

(c) Amended on June 14, 2022 to include northern residents deductions.

How living wages are calculated



"I believe in paying a livable wage because I think anybody who is willing to work to the best of their abilities should be adequately compensated. I'd like to see more people being adequately compensated and not have to stretch themselves so thin."

Lynsae Moon, The Nook Café

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