



“POVERTY BY DESIGN”



**PUBLIC
INTEREST
ALBERTA**



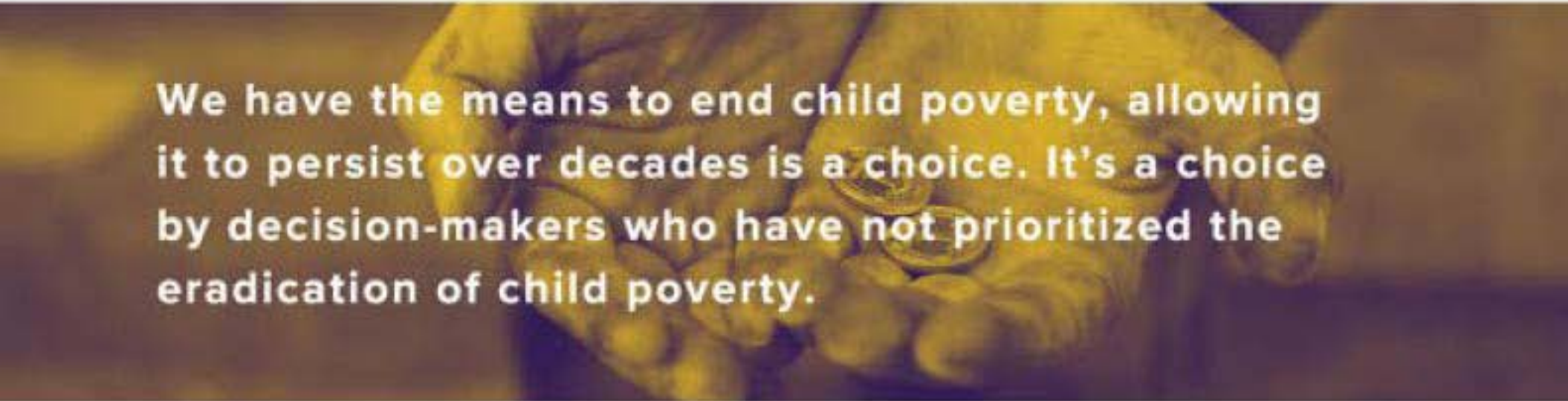
edmonton
SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL

2024

2024 CHILD POVERTY REPORT

Child poverty has persisted for decades in Alberta, and the crisis continues to deepen.

In 1989, the House of Commons resolved to end child poverty by the year 2000 (Campaign 2000, n.d.). We are now nearly a quarter of a century past this goal, and in many ways child poverty is more entrenched than ever. Too many children continue to not have their needs met, and experience inequities such as core housing need, food insecurity, energy poverty, and lack of access to quality child care. There are social benefits to addressing these disadvantages, ensuring that children can grow up to become healthy adults.



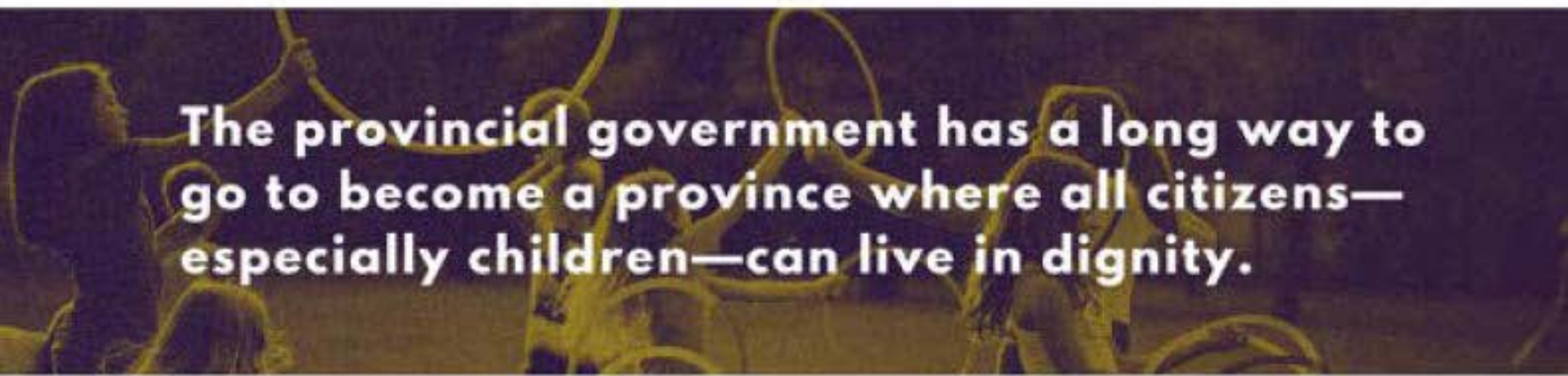
We have the means to end child poverty, allowing it to persist over decades is a choice. It's a choice by decision-makers who have not prioritized the eradication of child poverty.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Canada instated a suite of income security measures to protect families from falling into poverty, including the creation of temporary benefits and top-ups to existing benefits. This led to a steep decline in child poverty rates: 30,000 fewer Albertan children experienced poverty in 2020 than in 2019.

However, as people went back to work, pandemic benefits were not maintained and, as they were phased out, poverty rates rose. In 2022, poverty rates were higher than they were before the introduction of the Canada Child Benefit in 2016; 60,000 children have fallen into poverty since 2020. The government has proven it has the means to significantly reduce child poverty. It needs to take up the lessons learned during the first year of the pandemic and make permanent and meaningful policy changes to address child poverty.

The federal government created a poverty reduction strategy in 2018, built on the pillars of “living in dignity; providing opportunity and inclusion; and enhancing resilience and security” (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018).

However, Alberta does not have a poverty reduction strategy of its own, let alone a strategy to address poverty among children. This is a missed opportunity to coordinate efforts between governments on child care initiatives, income supports, health care, and education.



The provincial government has a long way to go to become a province where all citizens—especially children—can live in dignity.

CHILD POVERTY RATES

HOW DO WE MEASURE POVERTY?



The Alberta Child Poverty Report is an annual report produced by Public Interest Alberta and the Edmonton Social Planning Council. It is designed to inform policy-makers, advocates, and decision-makers in their work to end child poverty and create an equitable Alberta for all.

This year's report explores some of the current issues faced by children living in poverty, addressing household employment and access to basic needs.

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A "family" refers to a married or common law couple or a lone-parent with a child under the age of 25 who live in the same dwelling, whereas a "household" refers to people who are living in the same dwelling, whether they are family or not.

Despite being Canada's official poverty measure, the MBM has several limitations. First, the MBM uses data from the Canadian Income Survey, which, due to small sample sizes, is not as reliable when analyzing smaller geographies. The CFLIM-AT uses taxfiler data and is therefore more reliable in the Alberta context and is more comparable to other data from Statistics Canada (Centre for Income and Socioeconomic Well-being Statistics, 2021).

Second, while the MBM purports to show a modest standard of living, critics argue that the basket may not reflect the full realities of people living in poverty and as such underestimates rates of poverty (Sarangi, 2017). The CFLIM-AT has a higher threshold for poverty, and reports a higher prevalence of poverty.

Third, the Market Basket Measure currently only publishes data for a family of four, whereas the CFLIM-AT can be used to examine the poverty rates of several different family types. For these reasons, the Alberta Child Poverty Report primarily uses the CFLIM-AT to measure rates of poverty.

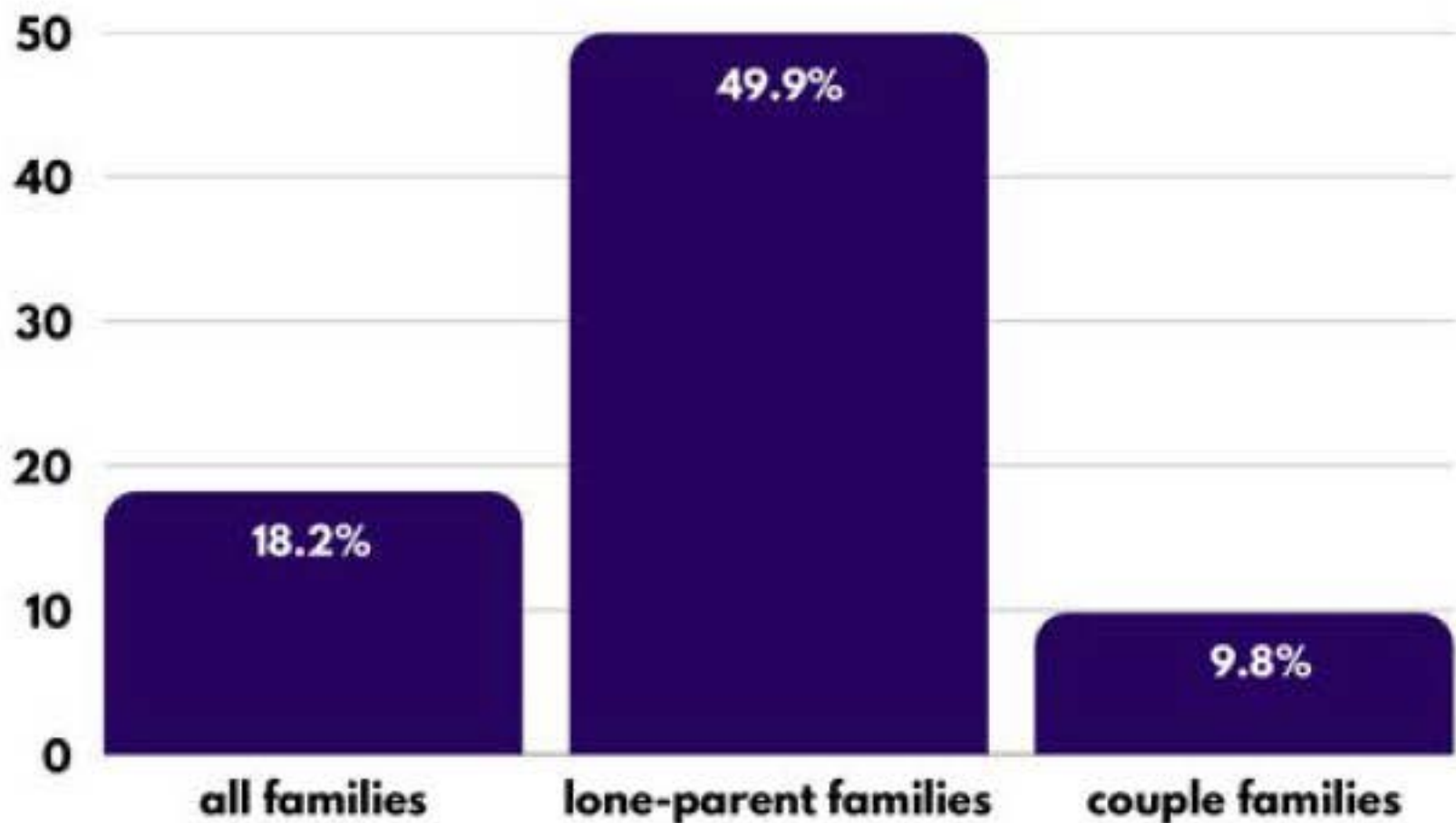


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POVERTY RATES

In 2022, 18.2% of children in Alberta were living in poverty according to the CFLIM-AT, that is 189,940 children who face inequities in accessing the conditions they need in order to thrive mentally, physically, and socially (Statistics Canada, 2024a).

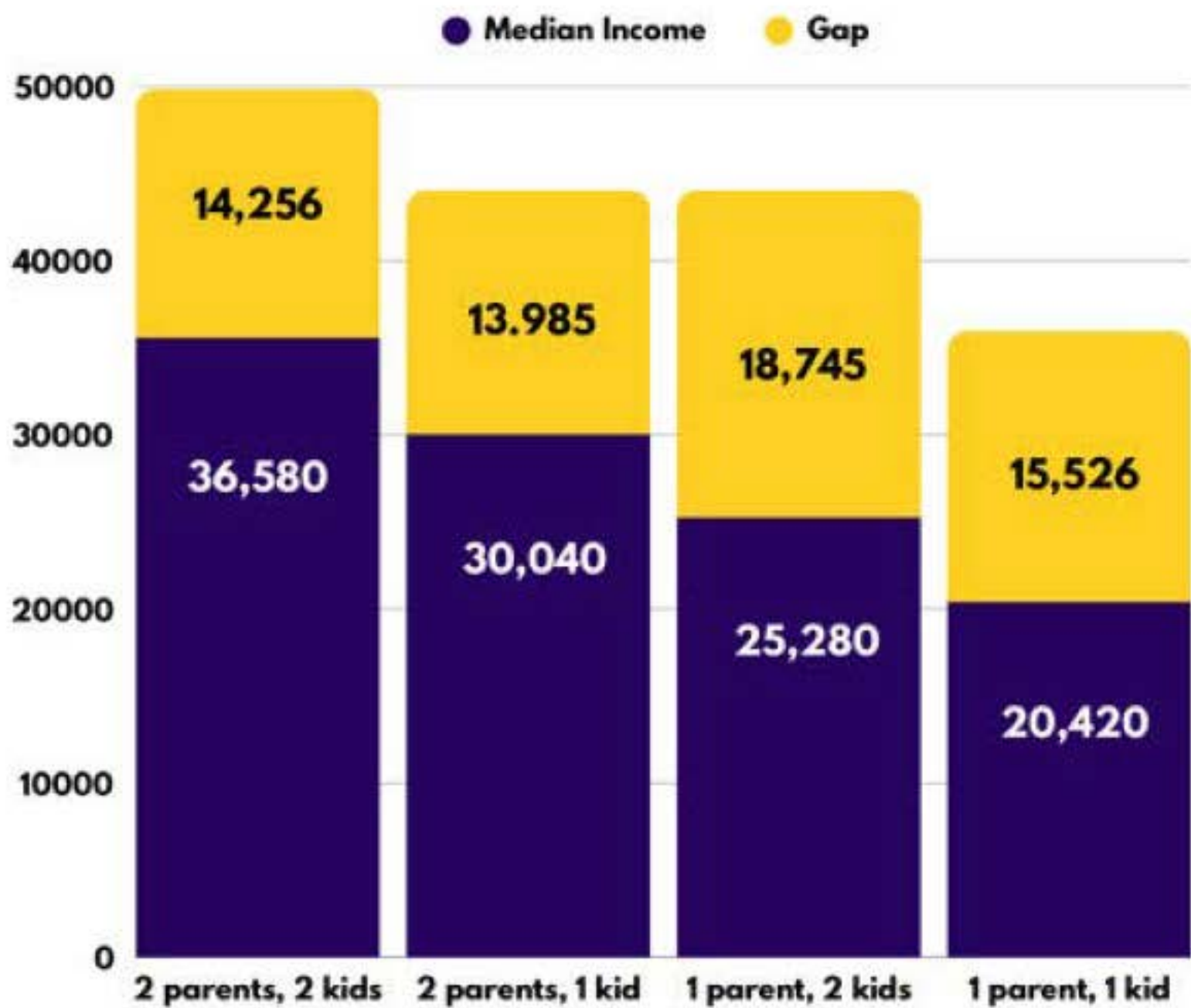
Poverty rates vary considerably by family type; almost half (49.9%) of Albertan children in lone-parent families lived in poverty in 2022, compared to one in ten (9.8%) children in couple families (Statistics Canada, 2024a).



Poverty Gap, by Family Type, Alberta, 2022

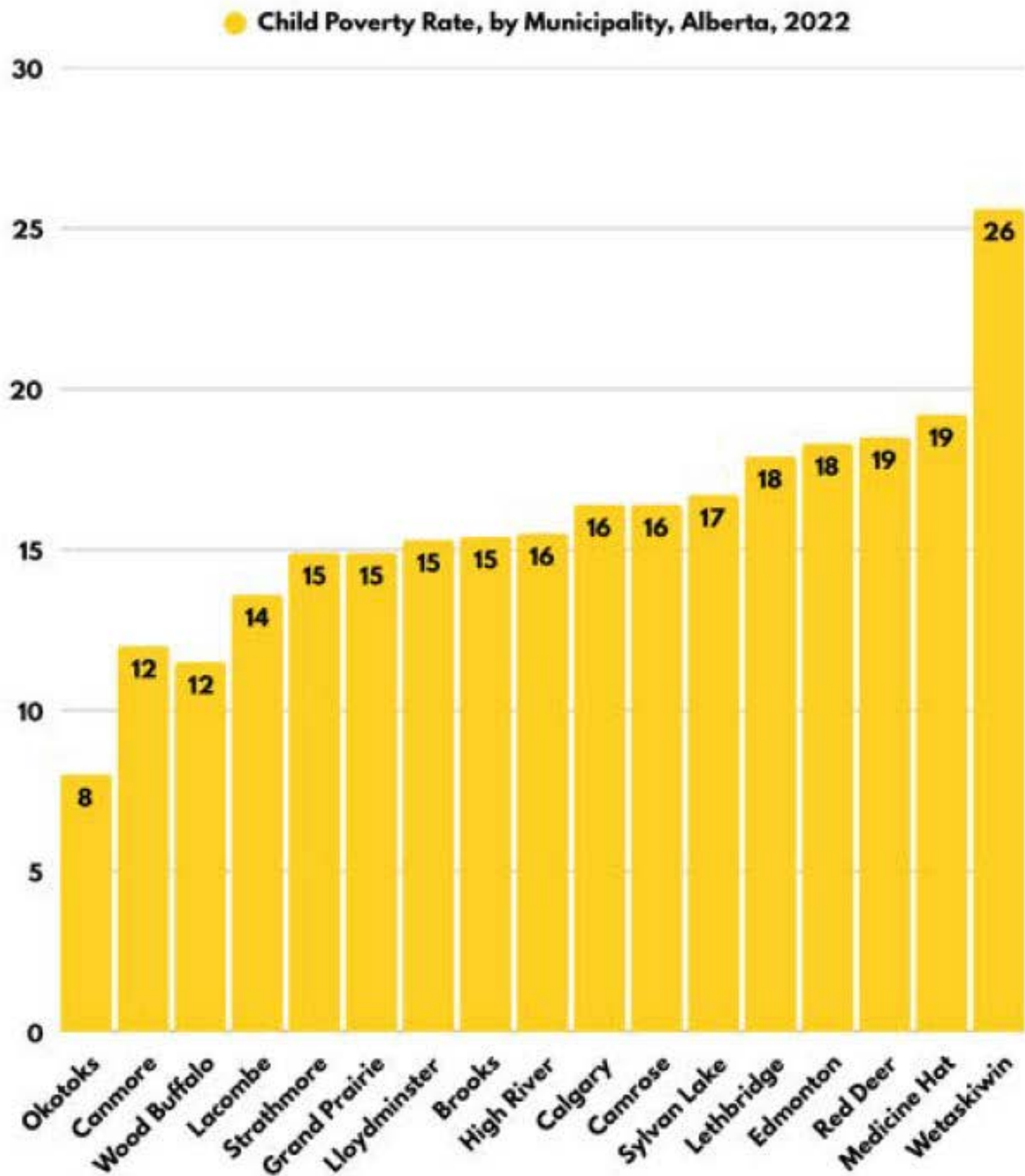
The poverty gap describes the difference between the poverty line threshold and the median after-tax income of all low-income families living below that threshold. Most low-income families live well below the poverty line, meaning they face significant challenges in meeting their basic needs.

Lone parents experienced the largest poverty gap—in 2022, lone parents with two children had an average income that was \$18,745 below the poverty line (Statistics Canada, 2024b; Statistics Canada, 2024c).



Poverty Gap, by Family Type and Size, Alberta, 2022

Across Alberta, different communities have different costs of living, employment opportunities, and access to social services. As such, experiences of poverty can vary significantly between different communities. In 2022, child poverty rates varied from 9.9% in Okotoks to 25.6% in Wetaskiwin (Statistics Canada, 2024a).




LIFTING CHILDREN OUT OF POVERTY

GOVERNMENT BENEFITS

Both the provincial and federal government provide families with income transfers to help them with the cost of raising children, and to improve those children's quality of life. The Canada Child Benefit (CCB), along with the Alberta Child and Family Benefit (ACFB), are paid directly to eligible families with children under the age of 18.

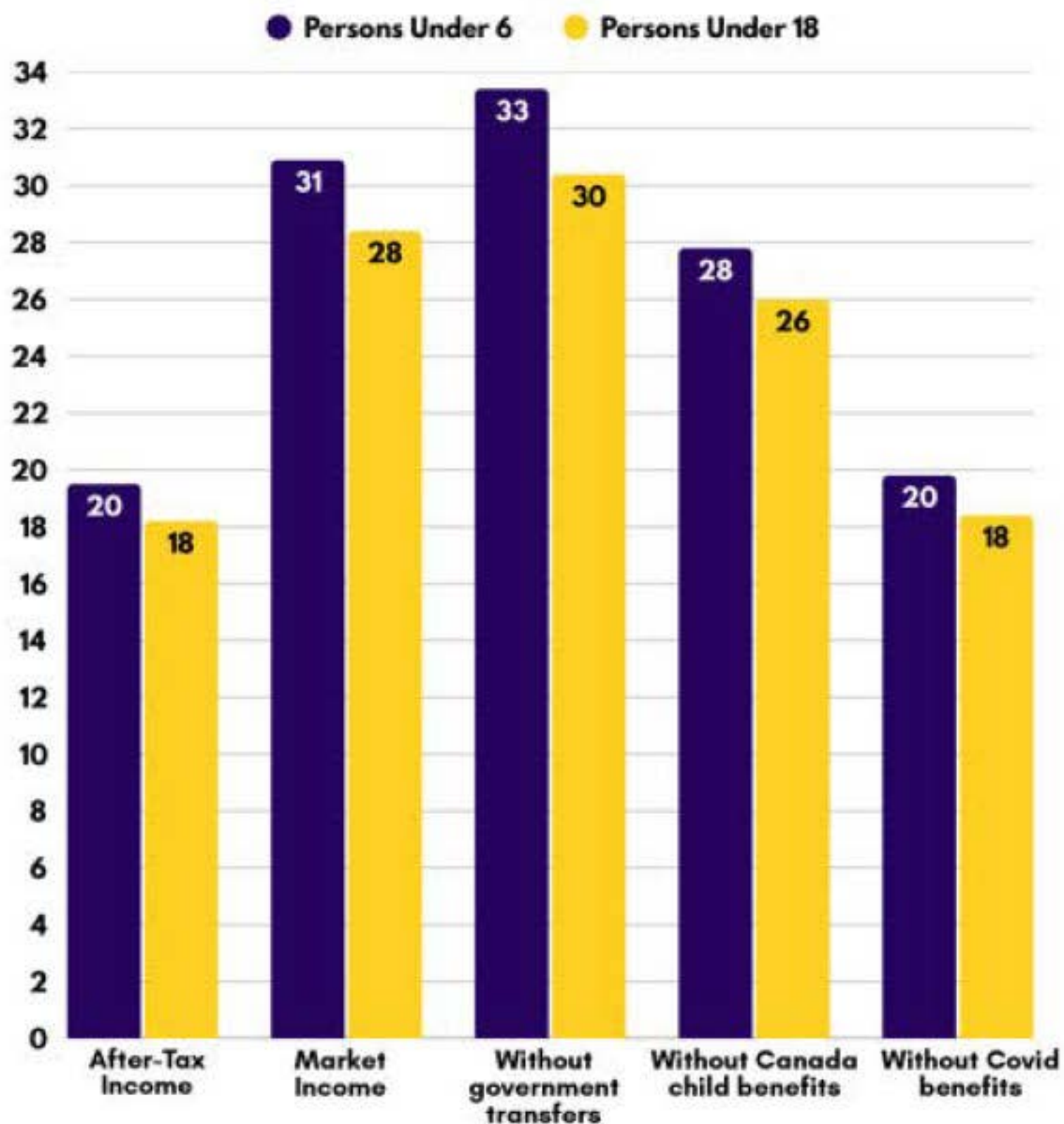
Families also have access to benefits available to all Canadians, such as the GST/HST credit, and the Carbon Rebate. The amounts received are based on a family's income and number of children.

Government income transfers are an essential tool used to lift children and youth aged 0 to 17 years out of poverty.



Under Canada and Alberta's current benefits arrangement, 19.5% of children under 6 and 18.2% of children under 18 live in poverty.

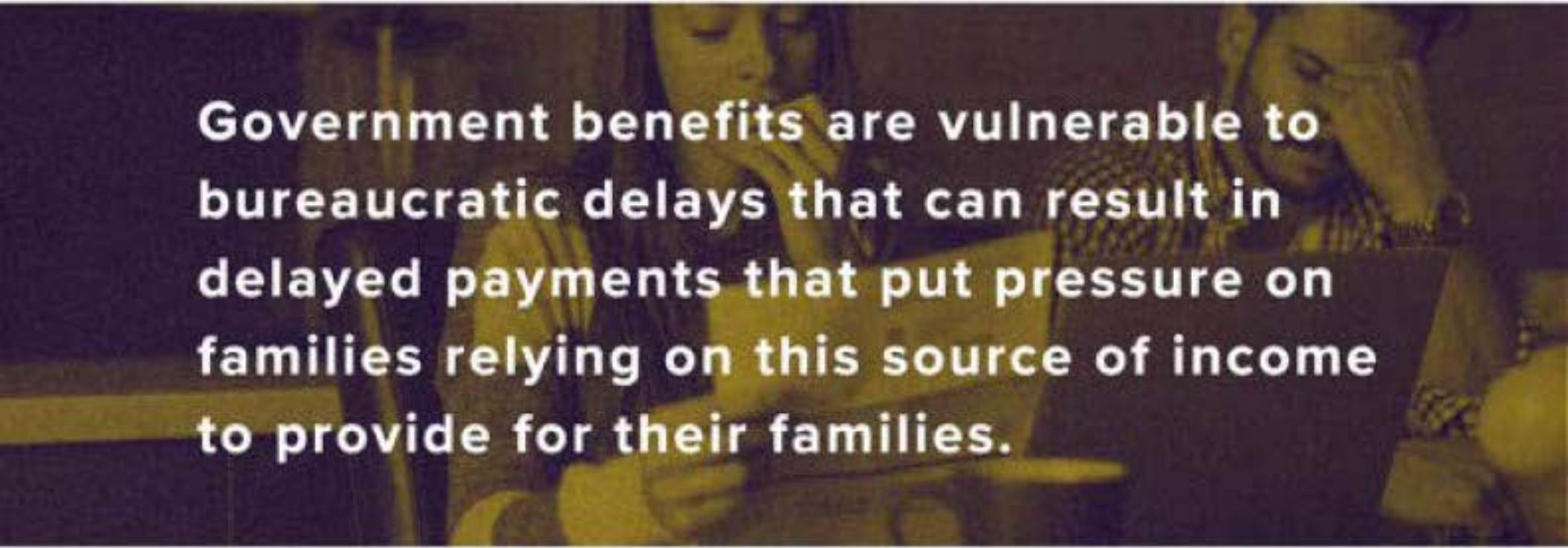
Without government benefits, those rates become 33.4% and 30.4% respectively (Statistics Canada, 2024d). This is a difference of roughly 40%.



**Percent of Children with Families with Adjusted Income below the After-tax LIM
Alberta, 2022**

Canada's recent history of benefit creation shows how impactful government income transfers can be, as well as the pitfalls that occur when benefits are not further invested in. For example, the introduction of the CCB in 2016 contributed to child poverty rates decreasing 1.5 percentage points the following year (Statistics Canada, 2024a). However, since then, no further significant investments have been made, and thus this rate stagnated.

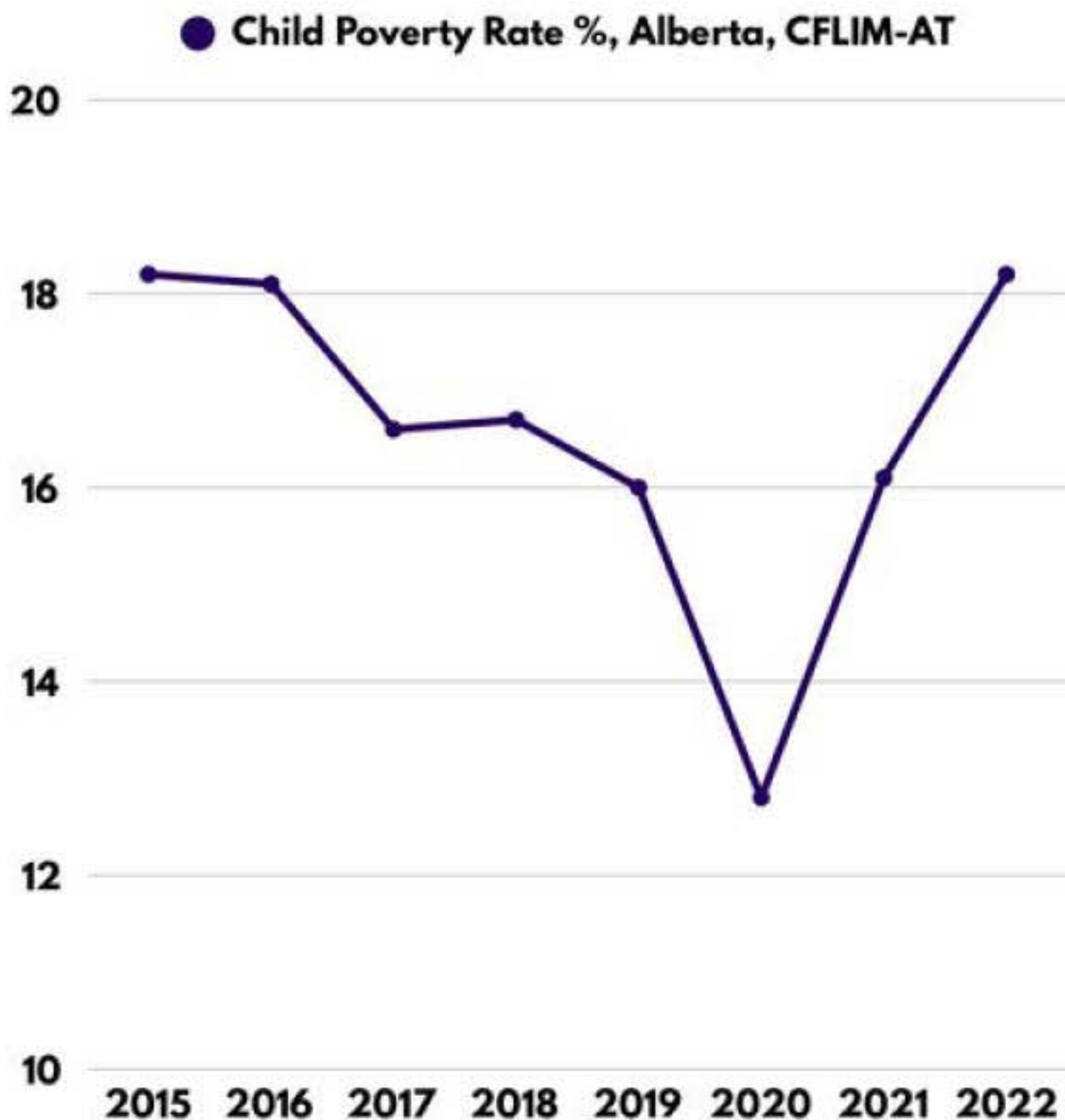
In addition, this transfer gives larger payment to families with children under the age of 6, meaning that families lose a significant portion of financial support once their children age, potentially pushing them back into poverty (Li and Tarasuck, 2024).



Government benefits are vulnerable to bureaucratic delays that can result in delayed payments that put pressure on families relying on this source of income to provide for their families.

In August 2024, a processing error in the delivery of the provincial Alberta Child and Family Benefit meant that more than 6,000 Albertans who qualify for the benefit did not receive it for more than a month after they expected it. Families preparing for the busy back to school season were given an unwelcome stressor during this period of time (Ellis, 2024).

It is essential to ensure that child benefits are delivered to families in a stable and predictable frequency to ensure their effectiveness.



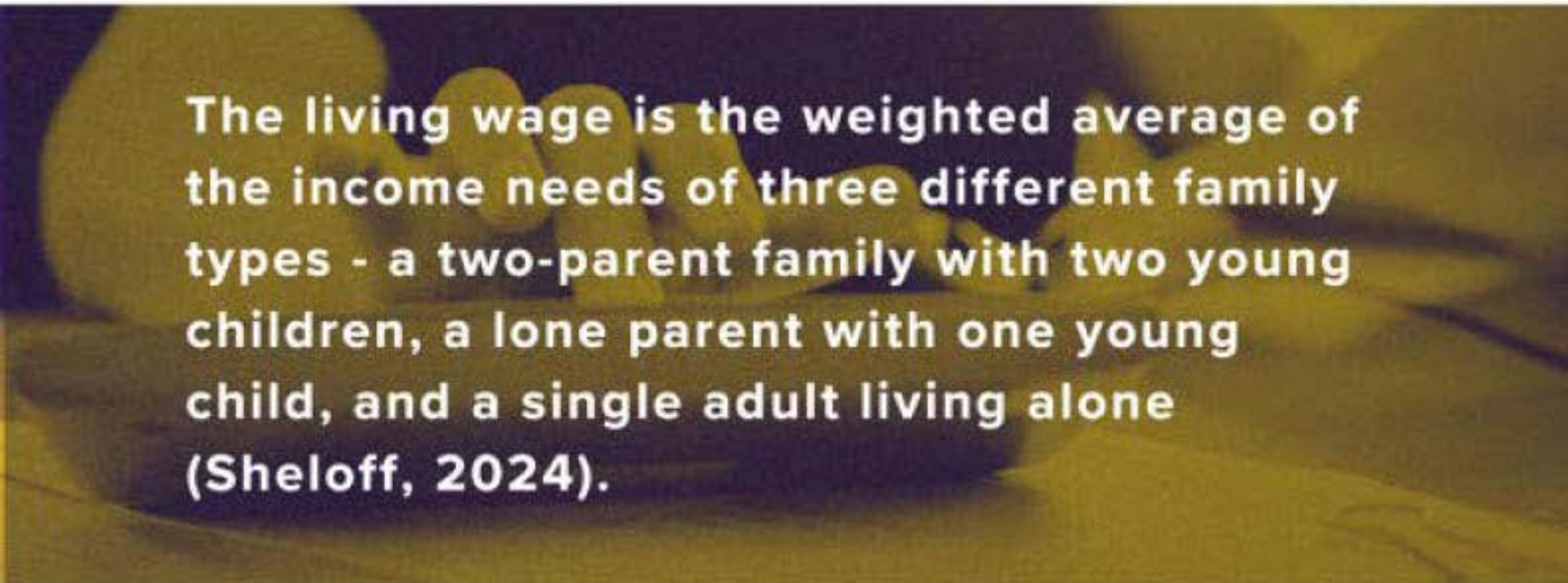
The recent history of government benefits has proven that governments can significantly reduce poverty when they invest in the social safety net, yet these lessons have not been being fully realized. CERB in particular represents one of the largest missed learning opportunities. Governments could have used COVID-19 benefits as a framework to make long-term improvements to the social safety net, through measures such as increasing benefit amounts, widening eligibility criteria, and reducing punitive claw backs.

However, no significant changes have been made since CERB ended. Allowing poverty to persist is a choice. It is time for policy makers to choose to learn from the Pandemic and make investments into the social safety net, if they do not, more families will suffer.

PARENTAL WAGES

Aside from improved child benefit programs, increased parental wages can also reduce child poverty rates. All parents, regardless of their job, should be paid a living wage.

A living wage is defined as the hourly wage that a worker needs to make to provide for themselves, their families, and reach basic financial security. It represents more than just a survival wage, and includes the things a family needs to live in dignity and participate in their community. This includes child care, allowance for one adult to attend school, extended health and dental plans, and a minor emergency contingency fund (Sheloff, 2024).



The living wage is the weighted average of the income needs of three different family types - a two-parent family with two young children, a lone parent with one young child, and a single adult living alone (Sheloff, 2024).

Living wages are essential to improve the well-being of children. First and foremost, if a parent is paid a living wage they can afford to meet their child's basic needs, including nutritious food, quality housing, weather appropriate clothing, health care, and quality childcare.



But a living wage goes beyond that. If a child's parent is making a living wage, they can purchase recreation centre passes, sports equipment, a trip to the movies, books, and birthday and holiday presents, all things that make life more enjoyable.

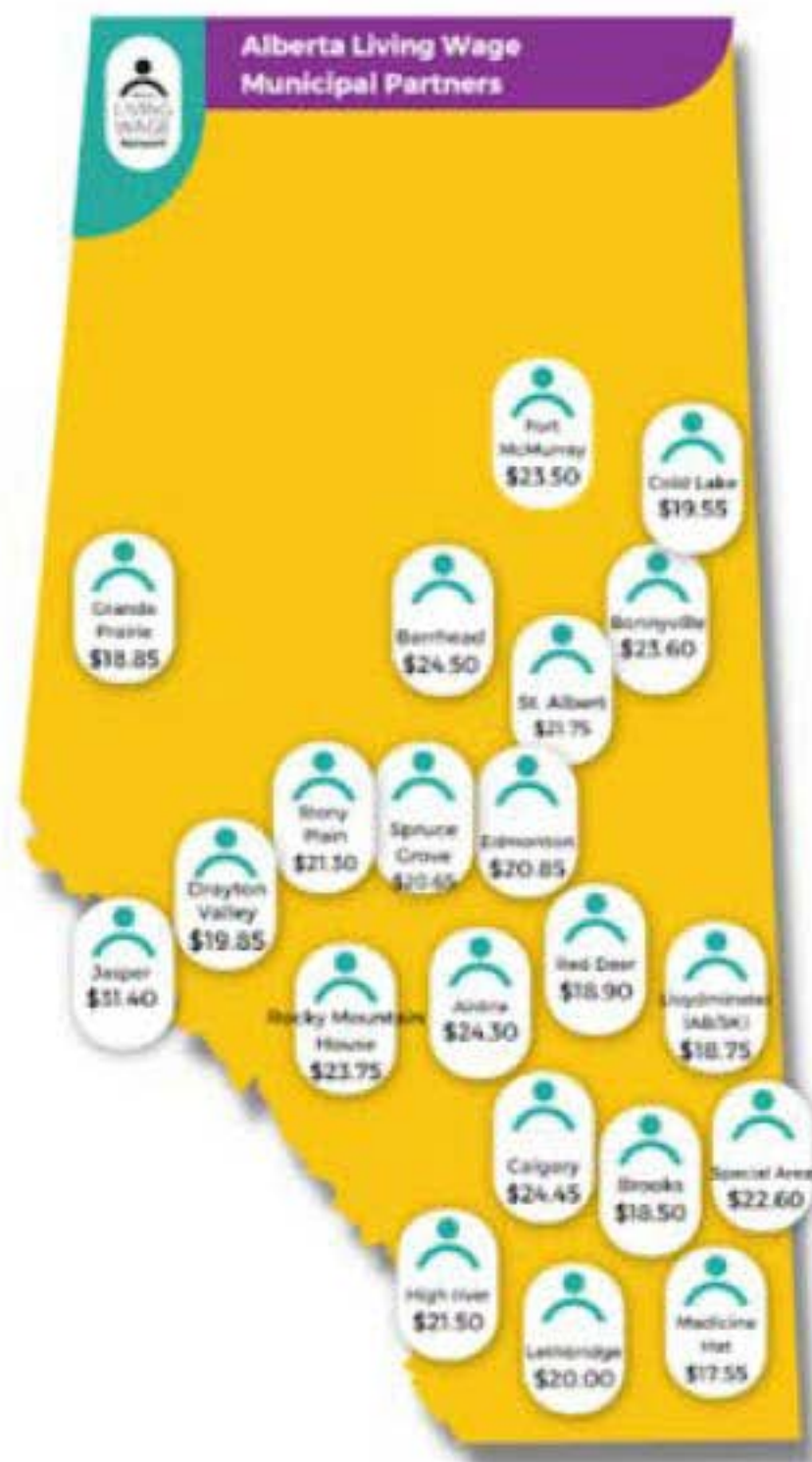
Furthermore, parents can spend more quality time with their children if they do not need to work multiple jobs and long hours to make ends meet (Alberta Living Wage Network, n.d.).

The living wage varies significantly across the province because the costs of goods and services are different everywhere.

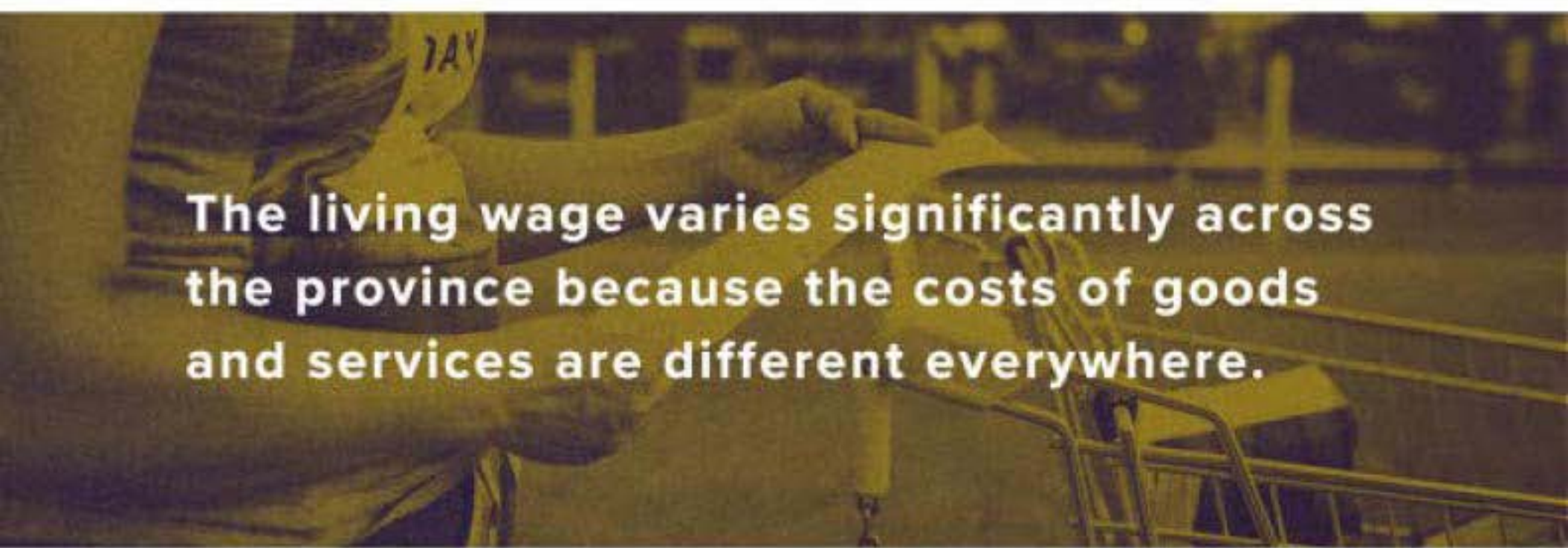
The Alberta Living Wage Network has calculated that the living wage ranges from \$17.55 in Medicine Hat to \$31.40 in Jasper. Ensuring that parents are paid a living wage will improve children's well-being as they grow up. (Alberta Living Wage Network, 2024e.

LIFTING CHILDREN OUT OF POVERTY

ALBERTA LIVING WAGE NETWORK



FOOD INSECURITY



The living wage varies significantly across the province because the costs of goods and services are different everywhere.

Food insecurity can pose a number of challenges on public health and health care services. Children who experience food insecurity at an early age are at risk of childhood mental health problems such as hyperactivity and inattention. Exposure to severe food insecurity has been linked to increased risk of developing depression and suicidal ideation in adolescence and early adulthood (PROOF, n.d.).

According to Statistics Canada's Canadian Income Survey, 27.4% of Albertans – or 1.2 million people – were living in a household experiencing some level of food insecurity in 2023, which is an increase of 5.6 percentage points from 2022 and exceeds the national average of 22.9%. Alberta is the fourth highest province for levels of food insecurity with only Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Saskatchewan ranking higher. Among children in Alberta under 18, 30.3% of them live in a food insecure household (PROOF, 2024).



This sharp increase in food insecurity is happening alongside rising prices of groceries. The price of food purchased from stores increased by 9.8% on average nationally between 2021 and 2022.


This growth in prices is part of an ongoing trend as food prices have gone up by 19.1% between 2018 and 2022 (Statistics Canada, 2024).

While food insecurity is experienced more often by people living below Canada's official poverty line (34%), it still can be experienced by those living above the poverty line (15%). In fact, the rate of food insecurity is rising faster among those living above the poverty line (an increase of 5.8 percentage points) compared to those living below the poverty line (an increase of 3.6 percentage points) between 2018 and 2022 (Statistics Canada, 2024). Within Alberta, about 40% of people living below the poverty line experienced food insecurity while 18% of people living above the poverty line were experiencing food insecurity, exceeding the national average (Statistics Canada, 2024).

Among household types, children living in lone-parent families are at a greater risk of experiencing food insecurity (36.4%), compared with children living in couple families (18.3%) and children living in other family types (18.6%).

Rising food insecurity also means food banks continue to see increased demand for their services.

According to Food Banks Canada's HungerCount 2024 report, there were over 2 million visits to food banks across Canada, the highest number in history. Within Alberta, over 172,000 people used food banks in March 2024 alone, a 11.9% increase from 2022 and a 92.4% increase from 2019. More than one in three children under 18 accessed food banks in Alberta (Food Banks Canada, 2024).



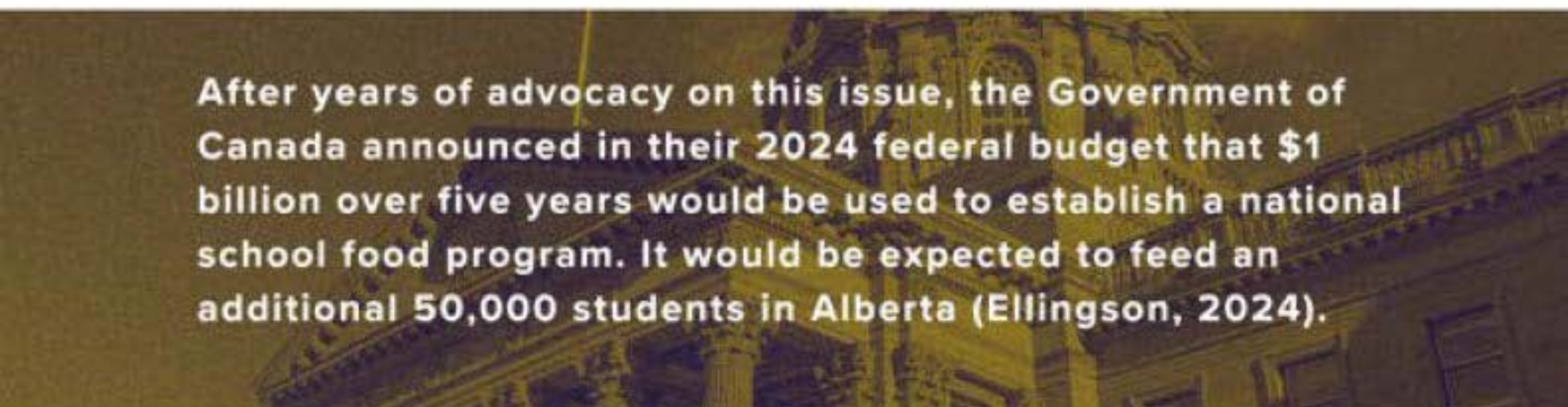
According to Statistics Canada, Canadians financial situations are so dire that 23% of them anticipate they will need to access a food bank in the near future. Among households with children, 55% reported that rising prices were greatly affecting their ability to meet everyday expenses (Postmedia News, 2024).

This high-level data lines up with what local food banks are witnessing on the front lines. Edmonton's Food Bank, for example, continues to see record-breaking demand. In May 2024, it provided 43,323 food hampers to clients and saw 1,700 new clients per month for the first half of 2024 (Tran, 2024).

Rural areas of the province also see increases in food bank usage, which face the additional challenges of longer shipping distances and higher prices for food as well as a lack of good-paying jobs (McKay, 2024).

Challenges for food banks in Alberta struggling to keep up with demand include Lethbridge (Opinko, 2024), St. Albert (Krecsy, 2024), and Red Deer (McIntosh, 2024), as well as a number of southern Alberta towns (Tipper, 2024).

School nutrition programs are an important measure to address the immediate food needs of school-age children, which Métisly serve about 58,000 students in Alberta (Government of Alberta, 2024). Students in schools with a universal breakfast program have experienced fewer discipline problems, improved behaviour, better attendance and learning, and improved psychosocial well-being (Maimann, 2019).



After years of advocacy on this issue, the Government of Canada announced in their 2024 federal budget that \$1 billion over five years would be used to establish a national school food program. It would be expected to feed an additional 50,000 students in Alberta (Ellingson, 2024).

Families are dealing with more pervasive material deprivation than just food. It means they have to make difficult decisions on whether to buy groceries or pay utility bills and are more likely to have poor mental and physical health, increasing the necessity for health care services such as hospitalization (Li and Tarasuk, 2024). Child benefits are considered the most efficient policy lever of meaningfully addressing food insecurity for children.

Responding to immediate and emergency food needs is an important short-term response to those living in poverty, but long-term solutions to addressing food security are necessary. Steps need to be taken to ensure adequate incomes – whether from employment or government benefits – are provided to families in need.

CHILD POVERTY AMONG FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS, AND INUIT FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES



“Poverty by Design”

-CINDY BLACKSTOCK

The legacy and ongoing policies of colonialism continue to cause and entrench child poverty among First Nations, Métis and Inuit children, across Canada and within Alberta.

While the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a historic undertaking, producing 94 calls to action for true justice, many critics have expressed disillusionment with the progress being made by governments, particularly when it comes to alleviating poverty and child poverty within these communities.

According to the Yellowhead Institute, no calls to action were completed in 2023, and it would take until 2081 to complete all the calls to action at that pace.¹

In total, only 13 of 94 calls to action have been completed (Jewel & Mosby, 2023). Of particular concern, the following critical calls to action regarding child welfare, education, health and justice have not been completed:

¹ <https://toronto.citynews.ca/2023/12/20/truth-and-reconciliation-commission-calls-to-action-done-2081/>

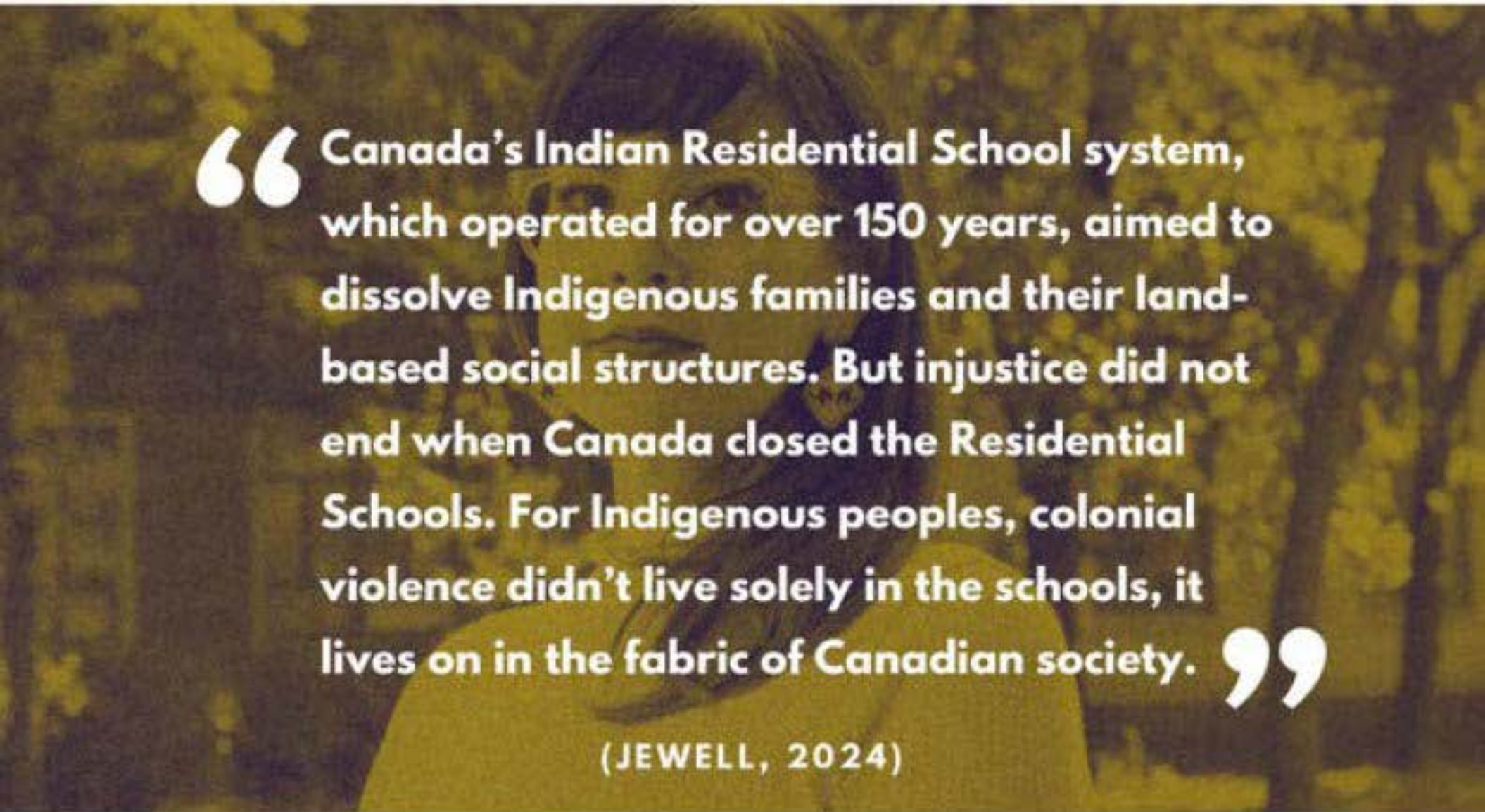
While a national school food program has the potential of improving student nutrition, educational success, build stronger school communities, and support local economic production and agriculture, experts caution it will not get to the root causes of food insecurity, which is inadequate incomes.

2. We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with the provinces and territories, to prepare and publish annual reports on the number of Aboriginal children (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) who are in care, compared with non-Aboriginal children, as well as the reasons for apprehension, the total spending on preventive and care services by child-welfare agencies, and the effectiveness of various interventions.

9. We call upon the federal government to prepare and publish annual reports comparing funding for the education of First Nations children on and off reserves, as well as educational and income attainments of Aboriginal peoples in Canada compared with non-Aboriginal people.

19. We call upon the federal government, in consultation with Aboriginal peoples, to establish measurable goals to identify and close the gaps in health outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, and to publish annual progress reports and assess longterm trends. Such efforts would focus on indicators such as: infant mortality, maternal health, suicide, mental health, addictions, life expectancy, birth rates, infant and child health issues, chronic diseases, illness and injury incidence, and the availability of appropriate health services.

As Dr. Eva Jewell, one of two researchers on the TRC Calls to Action recently stated:



“Canada’s Indian Residential School system, which operated for over 150 years, aimed to dissolve Indigenous families and their land-based social structures. But injustice did not end when Canada closed the Residential Schools. For Indigenous peoples, colonial violence didn’t live solely in the schools, it lives on in the fabric of Canadian society.”

(JEWELL, 2024)

As such, Canada and Alberta cannot hope to address child poverty without addressing and redressing the extreme intergenerational and genocidal damage perpetrated by colonial forces against First Nations, Indigenous and Métis communities and families.


The ongoing reality is that indigenous child poverty is not accidental, but systemic and deeply rooted in historical and ongoing colonial policies.

JORDAN'S PRINCIPLE

Jordan's Principle, named in loving memory of Jordan River Anderson, a child from Norway House Cree Nation, aims to ensure First Nations children get support when they need it. From 2016 to 2024, more than 7 million services, supports and materials, such as educational supports and mental health services, were approved under Jordan's Principle. (Government of Canada, 2025).

The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal's recent ruling in November 2024 exposed a critical crisis in funding and timely and adequate access to services under Jordan's Principle (Nation Talk, 2024). What this means is that the Government of Canada and provincial governments are failing to uphold and implement Jordan's Principle with adequate resources and execution.

In Alberta, the provincial government continues to underfund services for children and youth in care, including cutting the Transitions to Adulthood Program (TAP), which supports Albertans transitioning out of the child welfare system— this system is disproportionately represented with Indigenous youth.



As of December 2022, 74 per cent of youth in care in Alberta were Indigenous, but just 10 per cent of youth in Alberta are indigenous (Government of Alberta, 2023).

These statistics are more than just numbers, they are human beings whose lives are all too often cut short as a result of provincial government policy failure and underfunding.

Between 2023-2024, The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (OCYA) completed 47 reviews of young Albertans who died and one who received serious injuries while receiving provincial government care or within two years of receiving services (OCYA, 2024).



Of these 48 young people, 35 were Indigenous. That is 73%.

The OCYA has made recommendations to the Minister responsible for Children's Services, but to date, has not committed to implementing any of those new recommendations. We echo those recommendations here:

- The Ministries of Education, Health, Justice, Children and Family Services, Mental Health and Addiction, Public Safety and Emergency Services, and Seniors, Community and Social Services should each conduct an annual assessment to identify the supports they fund that are provided at a community level.**
- The Ministries of Education, Health, Justice, Children and Family Services, Mental Health and Addiction, Public Safety and Emergency Services, and Seniors, Community and Social Services should each strengthen coordination between funded services that are provided at a community level, both within their respective ministry and between ministries.**

- The Ministries of Education, Health, Justice, Children and Family Services, Mental Health and Addiction, Public Safety and Emergency Services, and Seniors, Community and Social Services should each strengthen navigation between funded services that are provided at a community level, both within their respective ministry and between ministries.
- The Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction should publicly post mental health and addiction service options available to children and youth, along with their wait times.
- The Ministry of Children and Family Services should review and revise the supports provided under the Transition to Adulthood Program (TAP).

Specifically, Minister Searle Turton has said that he believes youth are more “resilient” as a result of his government’s policies, which include defunding programs and services for youth in care (Bellefontaine, 2024).

What this means is that the government has downloaded more responsibility onto youth, forcing them to overcome barriers the government created.

Despite the Minister’s assurances, Indigenous child poverty is rising in Alberta and the number of deaths and serious injuries of indigenous children and youth in care continues at an alarming rate.

HOUSING

Housing is a human right.

Adequate housing is recognized as part of the right to an adequate standard of living by the United Nations in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (United Nations, 2009). Canada ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1976, meaning it formally agreed to comply with the right to housing under international human rights law (National Right to Housing Network, n.d.).

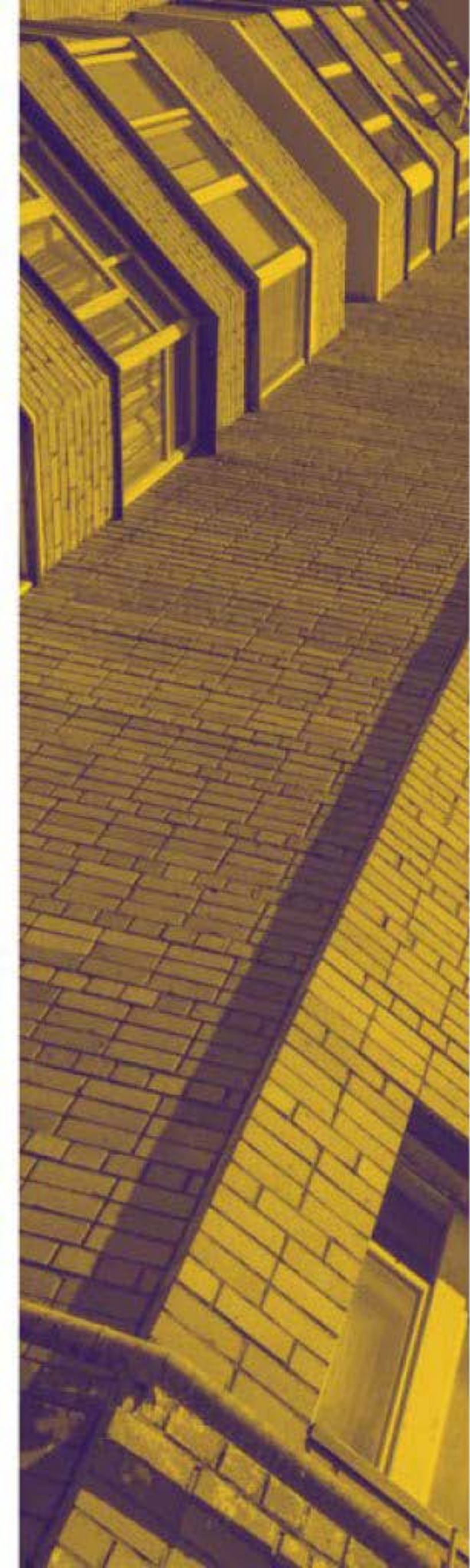
More recently, the federal government passed the National Housing Strategy Act in 2019, which not only recognizes housing as a human right but also commits organizations and governments to reform housing laws, policies, and programs from a human rights perspective (Canadian Human Rights Commission, n.d.).



Housing is crucial for the development of children. Families with safe, stable, and affordable housing show fewer health problems, improved school performance, less psychological stress, and more self-assured parents (Habitat for Humanity, n.d.).

Research has identified a number of positive aspects of subsidized housing on the well-being of children and families.

This includes a greater feeling of safety, a sense of community with neighbours, happier children, greater privacy, and less stress (Anucha and Jeyapal, 2009).



In turn, inadequate housing can have detrimental impacts on children.

This includes aggressive behaviours, property offences, diminished school performance, asthma symptoms and diminished overall health status (Canadian Paediatric Society, 2015).

Despite these lofty goals on an international and national level, ensuring that adequate and affordable housing is accessible to all, especially marginalized groups, has been significantly lagging behind.

A key component to understanding people's housing situation is whether or not they live in core housing need, which is defined as

- whether a person's housing is considered **unaffordable** (when 30% or more of before-tax household income goes toward shelter costs),
- **inadequate** (in need of major repairs), and/or
- **unsuitable** (when there aren't enough rooms for the size and composition of households).

According to the 2022 Canadian Housing Survey, more than one in five renters (22.1%) live in core housing need, which is almost double the rate for all households (11.6%). 2024).

Among households in core housing need, the vast majority of them (88.4%) cited affordability as a factor. Racialized (14.1%) and Indigenous (17.9%) households were also more likely to be in core housing need.

Lone-parent households are also more likely to live in core housing need (21%). While rates of core housing need within Alberta (11.3%) is close to the national average, rates are on an upward trend, especially in Edmonton where core housing need sits at 12.1%.

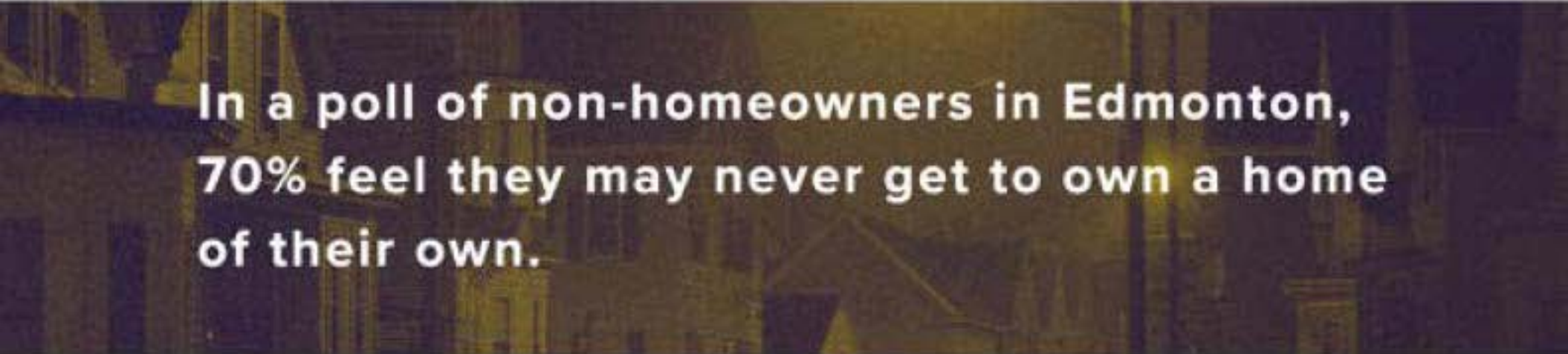
Financial hardships are driving the increase in core housing need with 21.6% of households reporting some level of financial difficulty in 2022 due to increased rent or mortgage payments. This has gone up significantly compared to previous years when it was 12.4% in 2018 (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation,

Affordability, or lack thereof, is the major driving force behind the housing crisis we are facing. Wages, especially among those living on low incomes, are simply not keeping up with the cost of living and this includes housing.

According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the gap between the minimum wage and a rental wage – defined as the hourly wage needed to afford market rental housing – continues to widen. In Alberta, the rental wage for a one-bedroom apartment is \$23.98 per hour, while the rental wage for a two-bedroom apartment is \$27.98.

This means a minimum wage worker earning \$15 per hour cannot afford market rent. Within Calgary, the situation is even worse where the rental wage for a one-bedroom apartment is \$28.92 and the rental wage for a two-bedroom apartment is \$33.46 (Macdonald and Tranjan, 2024).

As a result, renters are stuck in an increasingly untenable situation, which includes drastic rent increases and the feeling that owning a home of their own is increasingly out of reach for them. According to Statistics Canada's Consumer Price Index, rent has increased by 20% between 2019 and 2024 (Scace, 2024).



In a poll of non-homeowners in Edmonton, 70% feel they may never get to own a home of their own.

In addition, they blame the price of rent on high interest rates, landlords gouging tenants, and not enough available units (Kamal-Choufi, 2024).

Inadequate housing – defined as housing in need of major repairs – is also a pressing concern as the supply of affordable housing units is aging and delays in repairs are taking a toll on the condition of the existing supply.

Approximately 1 in 6 (16.8%) households living in core housing need cited inadequacy as a factor (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2024). While the Government of Alberta is providing \$121 million in funding over three years to maintain and repair affordable housing units, the lack of a long-term strategy creates uncertainty within the affordable housing sector.

A large portion of the supply of affordable housing is over 50 years old which means that an appropriate level of investment over the next 10 years is important for the longevity of the units.

More than four-fifths of Alberta's affordable housing stock is considered to be in "fair and poor condition." This translates into 92,000 renters in Alberta living in spaces that are in disrepair or unsafe (Mansukhani, 2024).

At the same time, there is not enough construction of new affordable housing units. Advocates say Alberta needs 43,000 affordable housing units by 2030, but the government's plan is only 25,000 units by 2031 (Zielinski, 2024).

The untenable housing situation we find ourselves in is a perfect storm of stagnant and low wages, rising shelter costs, and a chronic underinvestment from government towards the construction and maintenance of affordable housing units.

A lack of attention in these three areas has laid bare the stress and turmoil many households feel, whether they live in market housing or a social or affordable housing unit. We need all levels of government to pay attention to this growing crisis and take meaningful actions.

RACIALIZED CHILDREN AND CHILD POVERTY

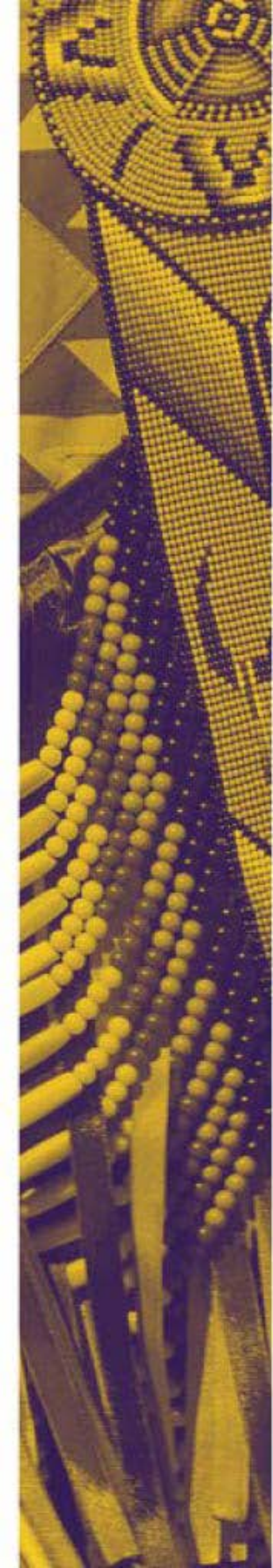


While progress in poverty reduction among successive generations of racialized Canadians is an encouraging sign, poverty rates for racialized people are disproportionately higher than the overall population. This is due to an historic and ongoing legacy of racism embedded within the systems that racialized people face, including health care, educational institutions, employment, and more.

Opportunities for advancement become difficult when systems are not designed for the needs of racialized groups who have historically not been given the same privileges and advantages that Canadians of white European descent have been afforded.

According to data from Statistics Canada, the number of racialized people in Canada has increased from 3.85 million to 8.87 million between 2001 and 2021, a significant increase over the last 20 years (Statistics Canada, 2023).

According to the 2021 Census of Canada, 11.1% of racialized people in Alberta live in low-income households. Poverty rates are higher when the first generation immigrates to Canada (13.9%), but the prevalence of poverty decreases for the second generation (9.0%) and third generation (10.3%) (Statistics Canada, 2022).



While progress in poverty reduction among successive generations of racialized Canadians is an encouraging sign, more actions need to be taken to properly support the first generation of racialized Canadians who first immigrate to this country.

While responsibility for immigrants is largely the domain of the federal government, all levels of government and other public institutions play an important role in the well-being of this demographic.

This includes building authentic relationships with immigrants, refugees, and evacuees as well as developing relevant policies to support them and recognizing their skills and strengths.

Any policy should incorporate interculturalism, examining how diverse experiences, perspectives, value sets, and community wealth can intertwine in ways that acknowledge people's individuality while also building on each others' strengths (City of Edmonton, 2023).

According to the City of Edmonton's 2022 State of Immigration and Settlement Report, many newcomers disproportionately face barriers such as poverty, language, racism, discrimination, PTSD, unemployment, non-recognition of credentials, and a lack of affordable housing (Boothby, 2023). For example, many experience barriers to meaningful employment, especially if they lack fluency in English, Canadian work experience, and Canadian accreditation for education received abroad.

The challenge is that immigrants are often viewed in terms of what they can offer to Canada on an economic model, but a shift in mindset is needed towards viewing immigrants as multi-dimensional people who have strengths that can contribute to society in meaningful ways.

International experience can be an asset and their cultural wealth can make for strong, resilient, and agile workers.

Shifting this mindset requires collaborating directly with community members in identifying systemic barriers they experience and working with them to address them. Engaging in power-sharing gives newcomers a voice and agency, and control over their own destiny.

This moves away from an old colonial model of top-down leadership in favour of community-driven leadership, where everyone has an opportunity to contribute and be heard. (City of Edmonton, 2023).

With the growth of Canada's population being driven by immigration, it is important that poverty reduction prioritizes addressing high poverty rates among this group. The proper integration, inclusion, and acceptance of newcomers is an important component towards meaningfully addressing poverty.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change, in the most simple of terms, is:

“a long-term shift in the average weather conditions of a region, such as its typical temperature, rainfall, and windiness.”

While some change in climate over time is natural, the drastic changes being seen today are largely caused by human activity such as the burning of fossil fuels.



In Canada, we have experienced rising average temperatures, along with more intense heat waves, droughts, and wildfires (Government of Canada, 2020).

In order to combat climate change, we need to reduce carbon usage.

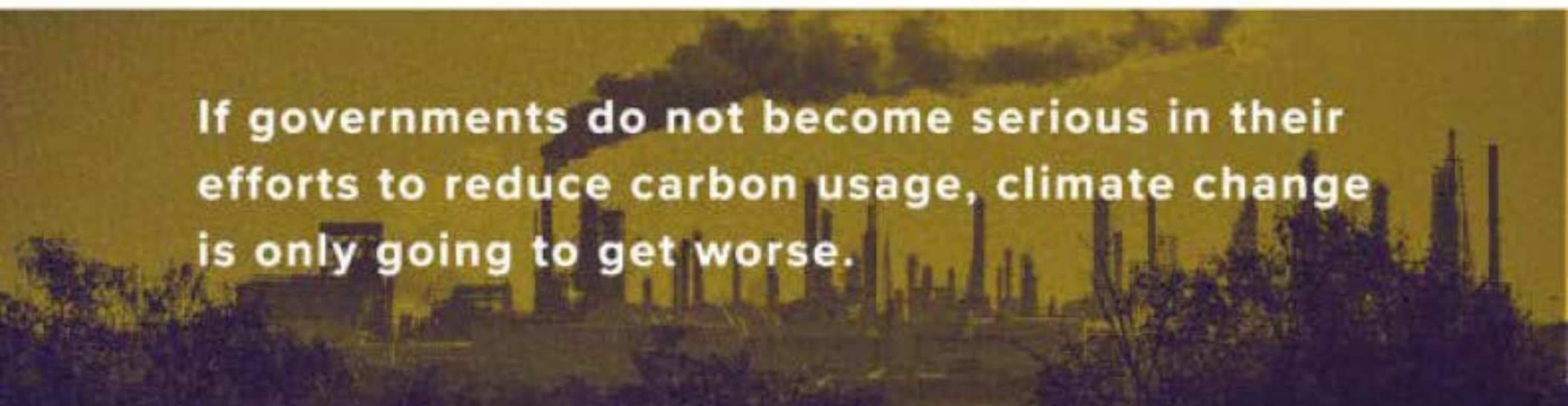
In 2022, Edmonton established a carbon budget – one of the first municipalities in Canada to do so. It aims to become carbon neutral by 2050, yet this very budget is currently predicted to still have emissions of 12.95 million tonnes annually.

This is only 4 million tonnes less than the city was emitting in 2021 (Cook, 2022). An updated budget from fall 2024 shows that Edmonton remains behind target to meet carbon reduction goals (City of Edmonton, 2024).

The Government of Alberta also aspires to reach carbon neutrality by 2050.

However, the provincial government's plan is vague and heavily relies on carbon capture, utilization, and storage technologies that many critics doubt will be effective in the long term (Dryden, 2023).

In November 2024, the United Conservation Party voted in favour of a policy resolution to abandon net-zero targets and remove the designation of CO₂ as a pollutant (Appel, 2024).



If governments do not become serious in their efforts to reduce carbon usage, climate change is only going to get worse.

Climate change does not just affect the physical environment, it is a form of structural violence. It has huge implications on our daily lives, and children and families living in poverty are even more vulnerable.

Climate change is a big factor in the rising cost of living and introduces many health risks to families. It heavily impacts children's futures. Many sections of this report discuss what is needed so that children living in poverty can reach their full potential, but what is "full potential" in a planet that is dying?

ENERGY POVERTY

Climate change is directly associated with energy poverty. As winters get colder and summers get hotter, families need to spend more of their income on heating and cooling their homes, costs which are becoming increasingly out of reach for families living in low income.

Statistics Canada defines energy poverty as a situation in which a household spends 10% or more of its after-tax income on dwelling energy bills. As of the 2021 census, 7.3% of Albertans were living in Energy Poverty, higher than the Canadian average of 5.6% (Dionne-Laforest, Heisel, & Situ, 2024).

Much like income poverty, energy poverty rates vary by family types. Canada-wide, couples with children had a rate of 2.4%, whereas single parents had a rate of 6.4% (Dionne-Laforest, Heisel, & Situ, 2024).

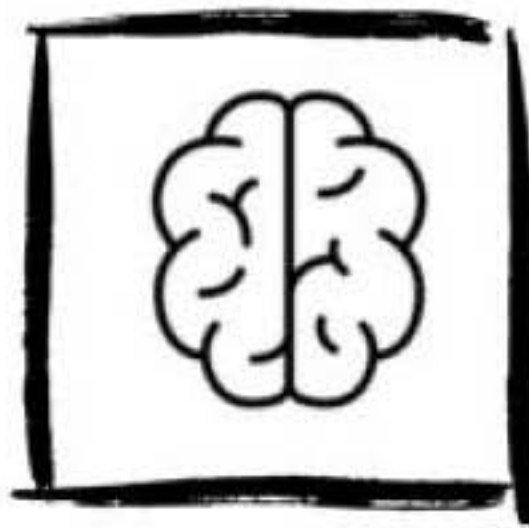
The Canadian Urban Sustainability Practitioners (n.d.), alternatively, define energy poverty as households that spend double the Canadian average on energy bills – or 6%.

This data is older (from the 2016 census), but shows a much higher prevalence of energy poverty. Edmonton and Calgary had the lowest energy poverty rates, at 16%. Census Division 4, which includes the town of Hanna, had the highest at 42%.

Living in energy poverty has detrimental health and well-being impacts. Not being able to heat one's house in the winter and cool one's house in the summer is uncomfortable, and increases risks of respiratory illnesses in children.

Families are forced to make tough budget decisions – sometimes foregoing groceries and medications – in order to pay energy bills.

In more extreme cases, non-payment of bills may result in families having their energy cut off, meaning they cannot cook food or run essential appliances, and food may spoil in fridges.



Overall, these experiences are extremely stressful and lead to poor mental health outcomes (Canadian Urban Sustainability Practitioners, n.d.).

THE RIGHT TO BE COOL

Renters have a much more limited ability to control the temperatures of their homes. Older homes in Edmonton were built with colder temperatures in mind, and as temperatures rise each year, these homes cannot handle the heat.

Homeowners have the ability to make improvements to their homes, such as installing air conditioners, heat pumps, energy-efficient windows, and improving insulation. Renters, alternatively, are at the mercy of their landlords.

Advocacy group Climate Justice Edmonton (2024) surveyed renters to learn their experiences of extreme heat. The study found that 90% of respondents experienced extreme heat within their homes and felt worried about the health and safety of themselves or their loved ones.

Furthermore, “1 in 3 survey respondents indicated that the heat in their rental unit is inescapable.” Many did not have the means to cool their homes, and landlords were unresponsive when asked for help (Climate Justice Edmonton, 2024).

Living in extreme heat has severe health impacts, including poor sleep, heat stroke, and exacerbation of existing health issues. Many people choose not to cook, leading to poor nutrition, which further complicates health effects. It can also impact one's work and social lives (Climate Justice Edmonton, 2024).

Extreme heat can be deadly. A study from Statistics Canada found that cities with higher proportions of renters have a higher incidence of heat-related deaths (Quick, 2024).

Temperatures will continue to rise year over year, and if no action is taken, the lives of children and families living in poverty are at stake.

DISASTERS

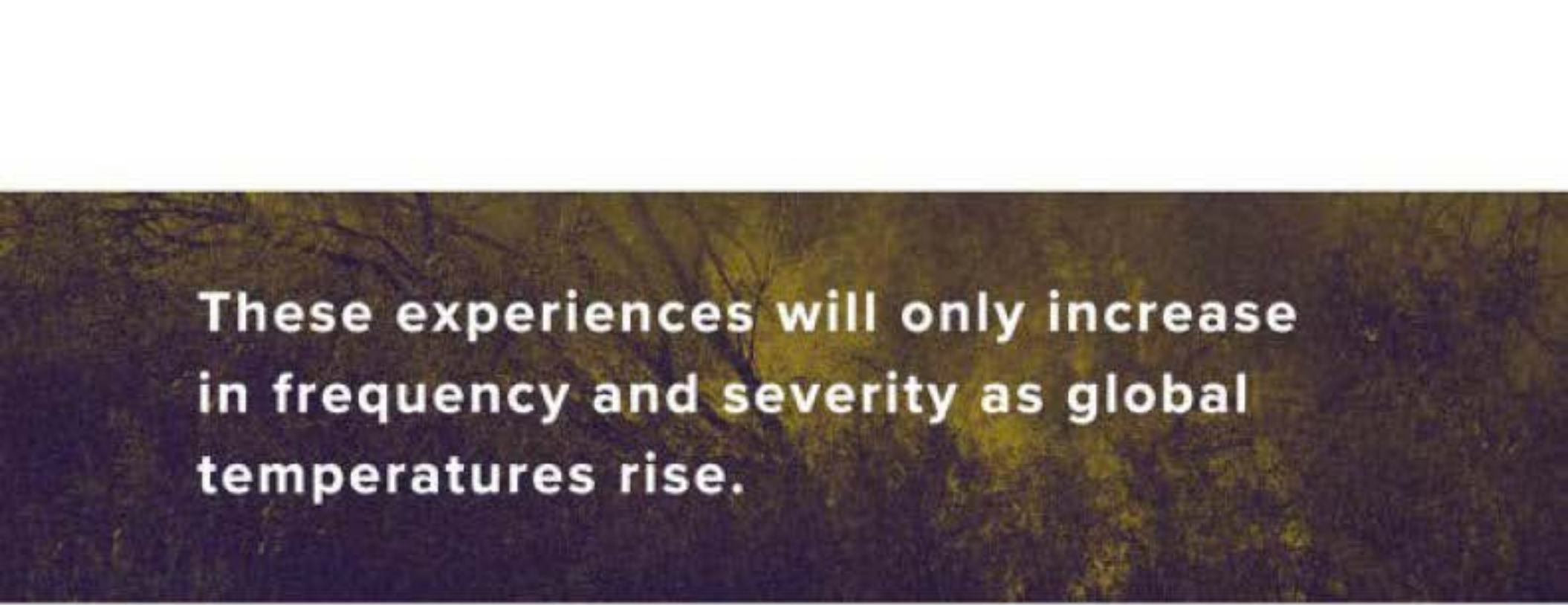
This past summer brought yet another devastating season of wildfires, forcing thousands of Albertans to leave their homes and sacrifice everything they own.

In July of 2024, wildfires in Jasper National Park caused the destruction of 800 housing units in the town of Jasper, affecting 2,000 of its almost 5,000 residents.

The town does not have the resources to provide temporary housing to all who need it, leaving many residents with nowhere to go (Farrell, 2024).

An op-ed written by a Jasper resident shared stories of people who did not have tenant insurance to cover their lost possessions, who cannot afford damage deposits and first month's rent for a new place, and who are forced to live in hotels.

Supports residents were promised are not being fulfilled, leaving many in an untenable situation (Charlebois, 2024).



These experiences will only increase in frequency and severity as global temperatures rise.

Incomes have a big impact on families' ability to weather climate emergencies.

Research from Statistics Canada (2023) found that people in households that were unable to cover an unexpected expense of \$500 were more likely to be concerned about the risk of weather-related emergencies, yet were less likely to have taken steps to prepare.

It is simply harder to evacuate when one is living on a low income.

People living in high-risk zones may not have the funds to create 'go bags' of essentials to take when fleeing. Low-income families are less likely to own cars, making it hard to pack up their belongings and leave. When they do have cars, the cost of gas for an extended trip is exorbitant. They may not be able to afford a hotel room to stay in, or meals to eat after abandoning their groceries. They are forced to miss work and lose income and may not have savings to fall back on. Once they come back home, they face greater difficulties in replacing any possessions that have been damaged.

Thus, families living in poverty simultaneously have more to lose and less power to protect themselves.

Indigenous Peoples are disproportionately affected by wildfires. While Indigenous people make up 5% of the population of Canada, they make up 42% of evacuations due to wildfires.

Many reserves are geographically isolated and lack necessary infrastructure, which makes it hard for residents to access basic goods and services, which in turn makes it more difficult to prepare for and recover from wildfires (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2024).



Wildfires exacerbate inequities Indigenous Peoples already experience, including poorer health, inadequate housing, and a lack of access to drinking water (Lee, 2023).

Increased prevalence of wildfires threatens Indigenous Peoples' traditional ways of life and cultural practices. Wildfires destroy sacred land, and the damage disrupts subsistence activities such as hunting, fishing, gathering, and medicine harvesting.

This is both spiritually harmful and makes it difficult for communities to feed themselves. Furthermore, wildfires undermine Indigenous rights to self-determination. Despite their wealth of knowledge and connection to the land, Indigenous communities are often left out of decision making processes regarding forest management and wildfire responses (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2024; Lee, 2023).

PREPARING FOR WEATHER-RELATED EMERGENCIES IN CANADA

In fall 2022,
1 in 5 Canadians

were extremely or very concerned about the risk of a weather-related emergency or natural disaster affecting their household.



■ Percentage of people who were extremely or very concerned
■ Percentage of people whose household took steps to prepare

Nearly
1 in 4 people

said that in the previous year, their household had taken steps to prepare in the event of a weather-related emergency or natural disaster.



P.E.I. residents were the most concerned about the risk of such emergencies or natural disasters and, along with Nova Scotians, among those most likely to have taken steps to prepare for them.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Social Survey (wave 1) - Quality of Life and Cost of Living, October to December 2022. Data for P.E.I. were collected in 2021.



People who said their household would be **unable to cover an unexpected \$500 expense** were more likely to be concerned about the risk of such emergencies or natural disasters and less likely to have taken steps to prepare.

	Percentage of people who were extremely or very concerned	Percentage of people whose household took steps to prepare
Household able to cover an unexpected \$500 expense	18%	26%
Household unable to cover an unexpected \$500 expense	26%	20%

Note: The data reflect the responses of the population aged 15 years and older in Canada's 10 provinces.

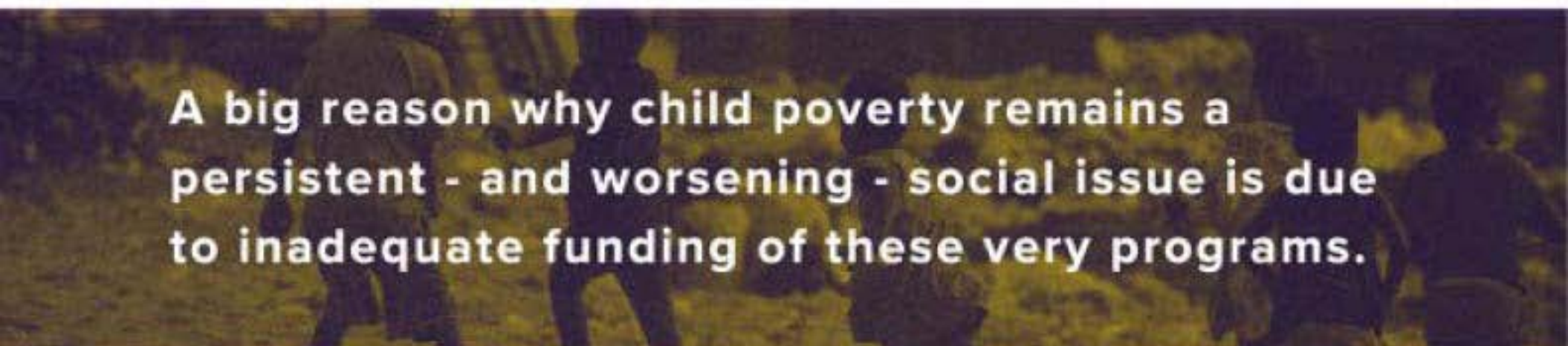
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Social Survey (wave 1) - Quality of Life and Cost of Living, October to December 2022.

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TAXATION, REVENUE AND INCOME DISTRIBUTION

Tackling child poverty takes planning and initiative from governments in collaboration with community partners and other stakeholders.

In order for government programs and services to be successful in meeting their goals in ending poverty, there needs to be sufficient funding in order to make the necessary investments into our communities.

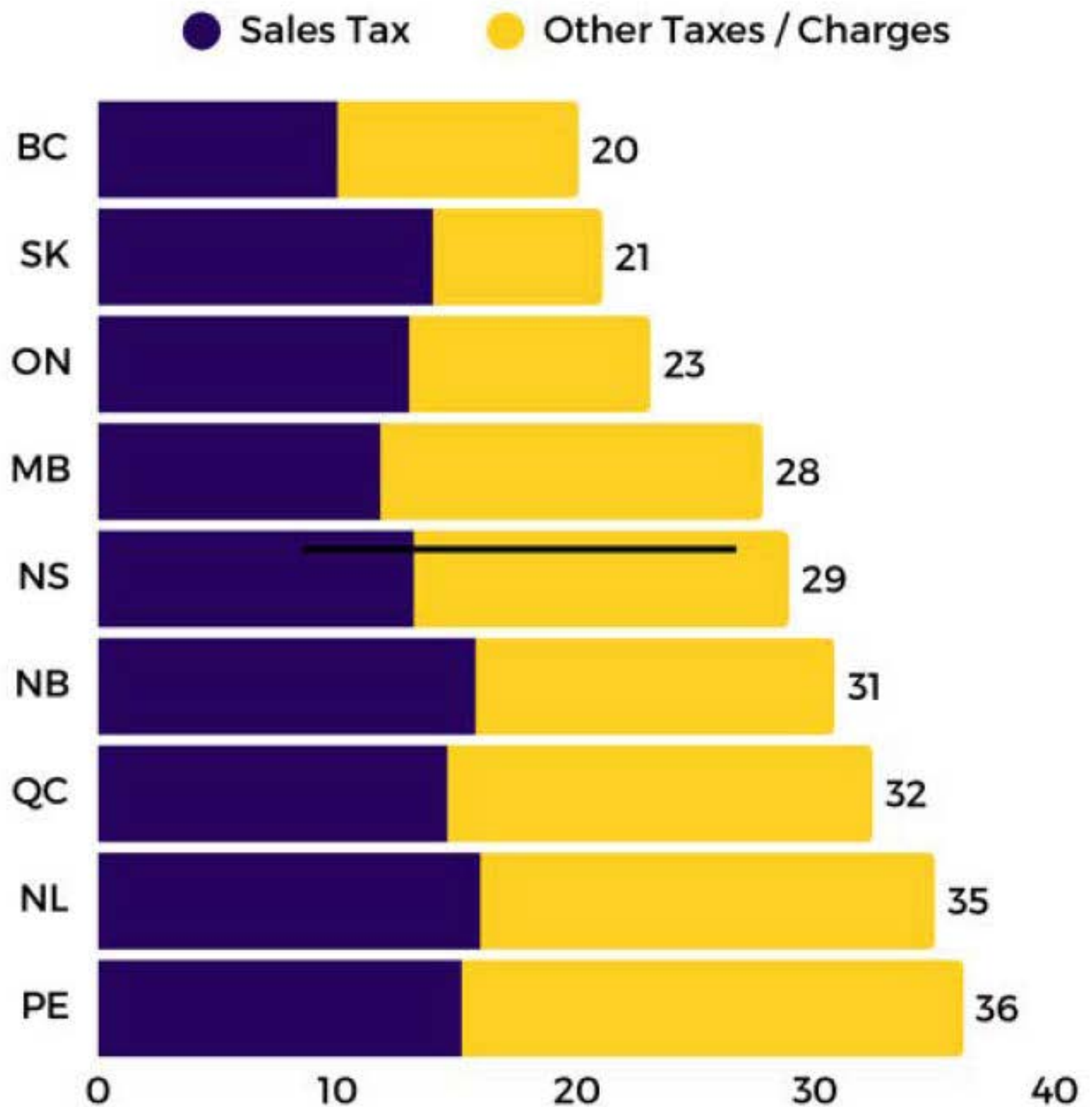


A big reason why child poverty remains a persistent - and worsening - social issue is due to inadequate funding of these very programs.

While the issue of taxation may feel peripheral in a report about addressing child poverty, the fact of the matter is our longstanding revenue problem is a major impediment towards reducing and eliminating child poverty.

According to the Government of Alberta's most recent budget from 2025, if Alberta had the same tax structure as the next lowest taxed province (British Columbia), it would have an extra \$20.1 billion in funds to spend on programs and services (Government of Alberta, 2025).

Alberta's Tax Advantage, 2025-26 (\$ billions)




The government could raise an additional \$5 to \$15 billion annually to invest in programs and services without increasing taxes for 90% of Albertans who already pay their fair share into the investments of our province.

It can achieve this by having the wealthy pay their fair share by implementing a more progressive income tax system and establishing a wealth tax on luxury goods, having highly profitable corporations pay what they owe by closing loopholes and properly taxing excess profits, eliminating public subsidies for highly profitable corporations, and raising royalty rates to ensure resource development benefits all Albertans.

For example, while a wealth tax might be difficult to implement on a provincial level, such a measure could be introduced on a federal level with transfers going to the provinces from the revenue that's generated (Kilgannon, 2022). According to a proposal from Canadians for Tax Fairness, a 1% tax for wealth over \$10 million, 2% for over \$100 million, and 3% for wealth over \$1 billion would generate close to \$20 billion annually.

Revenue from this tax can go towards a multitude of social programs aimed at reducing poverty and inequality more broadly (Anderson, 2025).

So far, there have been no meaningful signs the government would seriously consider such a change in direction.



In fact, the province implemented a new 8% personal income tax bracket for the first \$60,000 of income, effective January 1, 2025. This is a decrease from the previous rate of 10%.

This measure is expected to save Albertans up to \$750 in 2025 (Tran, 2025). While this new tax bracket would provide clear savings to Albertans, any savings for low-income populations would be offset by the government's move to deindex a number of benefits meant to support vulnerable populations.

This means that benefits like Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH), the Alberta Child and Family Benefit (ACFB), provincial income support programs, and the Alberta Seniors Benefit are capped to future increases of 2%, which is not aligned with the Consumer Price Index (CPI). This means benefits of this nature will not keep up with high inflation (BLG, 2025).

This very fiscal constraint on investing in support programs that assist vulnerable and marginalized populations only serves to keep these groups in poverty.

In addition, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate has outlined the consequences of underfunding programs designed to support marginalized populations.

They paint a portrait of a system where youth find it challenging to access services due to long waitlists and not having supports available in their community (Tran, 2024).

Adequate funding means children and youth get sufficient support related to mental health, addictions, and other challenges.

Alberta should renovate its fiscal and tax policy on the principles of sustainability, equity, and predictability. This process should be undertaken in consultation with Albertans, workers, economists from different schools of thought, and policymakers who understand the impact of tax policy's impact on the lives and livelihoods of Albertans and the economy in the short and long-term.

Simply put, a well-being economy centres people and our natural environment over economic growth, which generally externalizes human, social, and environmental costs. Under this framework, a well-being economy seeks to support people to live happier and healthier lives with higher living standards. High quality, purposeful work contributes to people's health, which then supports a vibrant labour market and resilient customer base (Government of Scotland, 2025).

In the long-term, Alberta should introduce new measures to assess the real human impact of its revenue, spending, programs, and services, referencing other jurisdictions that have introduced 'well-being' metrics to more closely connect fiscal measures with people-based policy outcomes.

Scotland, for example, has recently adopted a "wellbeing economy monitor" which regularly updates citizens and policymakers on a range of indicators: "to provide a baseline for assessing progress towards the development of a wellbeing economy" (Government of Scotland, 2022, page 2). Such an initiative would have positive ramifications if it were to be implemented in Alberta and in Canada as a whole.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Poverty has long-lasting impacts on the physical, mental, and social well-being of children and youth. Governments have the means to make significant reductions in child and family poverty, letting it continue to exist is a choice.

This choice is evident throughout the policies governments choose to - or choose not to - implement. Albertan children continue to be denied access to affordable, inclusive, and high-quality child care; affordable and nutritious food; and secure, affordable, and adequate housing. Below are recommendations for the Canadian, Albertan, and various municipal Governments to consider to reduce child poverty:

POVERTY RATES

- Ensure that all children can realize the right to an adequate standard of living by creating and implementing a provincial poverty reduction strategy with targets and timelines.
- Consider the development of a complementary Strategy for Children and Youth.
- Track progress using the Census Family Low Income Measure, After Tax (CFLIM-AT) calculated with T1 Family File data, rather than the Market Basket Measure (MBM) which currently is being used as Canada's official poverty measure.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Learn from the COVID-19 pandemic and improve benefits available to families, including the CCB and ACFB. Increase benefit amounts given to parents and change reduction rates so parents are not penalized for increasing their incomes.**
 - **increase benefits for children over the age of 6 so that families are not penalized when their children age.**
 - **assure that child benefits are delivered to families in a stable and predictable frequency to ensure the effectiveness of the benefit.**
- **Reverse government benefit reductions due to receiving the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) for moderate income families and protect the CCB from future clawbacks with legislative amendments. Implement CERB Repayment Amnesty for everyone living below or near the CFLIM-AT.**
- **Increase the Provincial Minimum Wage to bring it closer in line with the living wage. Remove the tiered minimum wage structure so that both youth and adults are guaranteed the same minimum wage. Ensure all minimum wages are indexed to inflation moving forward.**

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INDIGENOUS AND RACIALIZED CHILDREN

- Statistics Canada needs to measure and release poverty and income data related to Indigenous and racialized Albertans on an annual basis, just like it does with the general population.
- Collaborate with First Nations, Inuit and Métis governments and organizations to develop plans to end child and family poverty.
- Entrench Nation to Nation, government to government and Inuit-Crown relationships by ensuring respect for inherent rights, treaties, title, and jurisdiction; full participation in economic growth; sufficient, predictable, long-term funding to achieve well-being; and evidence-based closure of socio-economic outcome gaps.
- Meaningfully move forward anti-racism action plans at all levels of government. Governments should be in regular communication with racialized communities to ensure that plans are enacted in a way that serves their needs and reflects their lived experience.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CHILD CARE

- Promote licensed public and not-for-profit care that prioritizes quality over profit.
- Increase the recruitment and retention of early childhood educators by providing higher wages, benefits, and incentives to pursue professional development to demonstrate respect and value of the profession.
- Ensure that the new licensed child care spaces being created have enough qualified early childhood educators and resources to make them available to children who need them.
- Support the creation of licensed non-profit and public child care services in child care deserts.
- Consider implementing a set fee approach to minimize the inequalities in child care costs that families in Alberta currently face with a market fee approach.
- Reconsider the implementation of the Cost Control Framework and For-Profit Expansion Plan. The lack of clarity of this plan suggests that it has not considered what impact a two-tiered child care system will have on children living in poverty.
- Consult immigrant and minority families, as well as early childhood educators on what culturally appropriate child care means, and what this could look like in child care settings.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FOOD SECURITY

- Given that food (in)security is deeply tied to income security and access to financial resources, enacting any of the other recommendations listed will go a long way to advancing food security.
- Expand the School Nutrition program to address increased demand for the program so students can properly learn without having to deal with hunger while in school.
- Temporary measures like the Government of Alberta's \$600 affordability payments and the Government of Canada's one-time Grocery Rebate in 2023 are helpful for alleviating immediate financial concerns, but long-term tax credits to offset the high cost of living are necessary.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

HOUSING

- Invest in more social and affordable housing so that marginalized groups (especially those with children) are less likely to live in core housing need.
- Implement and enforce provincial minimum shelter standards.
- Introduce rent regulations in-line with other provinces.
- Develop a province-wide housing strategy to build toward one-third non-market, one-third market rental, and one-third home ownership for the mix of total housing supply.
- Protect existing affordable housing through rent control and eviction protection, particularly for low-income families.
- Allocate provincially-owned lands for the development of affordable housing.
- Enhance the Canada Housing Benefit so that families with children are not left behind. Increase income thresholds so that more families may access the benefit.
- Take immediate action on the commitment to ending homelessness as part of Canada's international human rights obligations.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CLIMATE CHANGE

- The City of Edmonton and the Government of Alberta need to make meaningful progress on their goals to become carbon neutral by 2050.
 - This involves not relying on unproven and risky methods such as carbon capture, but to invest in clean energy sources to reduce carbon emissions.
- The City of Edmonton should take up Climate Justice Edmonton's demands in the Right to be Cool report:
 - Develop and implement a maximum temperature bylaw for rental housing.
 - Expand public cooling spaces in every neighbourhood.
 - Launch a public inquiry into the impacts of heat and smoke on health, illness, and death.
 - Support a universal heat pump program.
- Learn from international examples. The government of South Africa provides enough electricity for basic lighting, water heating, and a small TV to 'Indigent' households. The City of Edmonton could create a similar policy giving free basic electricity – enough to run typical appliances – to individuals and families living on low incomes.
- Any climate policies go hand-in-hand with social assistance policies. Canadians need access to robust financial support to cope with climate change.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

TAXATION AND INCOME REDISTRIBUTION

- Review Alberta's income tax system and ensure a more progressive system applies to corporations and the highest earners.
- Explore and implement an excess profits tax and make sure tax loopholes are closed.
- Eliminate public subsidies to profitable corporations, including the UCP government's planned oil well clean-up incentive program.
- Review Alberta's non-renewable royalties system and raise rates to further benefit Albertans now and into the future.
- Review all legislation and regulations impacting the cost of living for low and middle-income Albertans, beginning with the Employment Standards Code and Residential Tenancies Act, for opportunities to reduce family poverty.
- Develop a provincial Poverty Elimination Strategy, similar to B.C., that would direct adequate resources to poverty reduction and elimination, beginning with redirecting budget surpluses.
- Urgently review Alberta's surplus and direct significant investments to income supports and programs proven to reduce family and child poverty.

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