



Public Interest Alberta

ANNUAL REPORT

2022
2023

2022 – 2023 Annual Report

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Introduction

We know what we are up against.

The UCP eked out a narrow victory in the last provincial election.

This was a huge disappointment for us and our allies in labour and civil society. We've seen time and time again how their regressive agenda of cuts, deregulation, and privatization have harmed our communities. And they show no signs of changing direction to effectively meet the challenges of climate change, the raging housing crisis, and the skyrocketing cost of living.

Instead, they have relentlessly attacked already stretched-thin front-line workers. They've gutted our public services. They've fumbled the management of the pandemic, the opioid crisis, and the protection of

vulnerable Albertans — with deadly results. They've prioritized the bottom lines of the corporate class above the needs of Albertans at every turn.

We know the odds are stacked against us. We know we have a tough road ahead to a just future for all.

But we have something they don't: people power.

And we know what we have to do.

The power of people working together has resulted in amazing gains for the public interest, even under the regressive mandate of the UCP. In response to huge public pressure, we've forced them to sign on to the historic \$10-a-day child care agreement with the federal government, seen them back away from privatizing public parks, re-index AISH to the consumer price index (CPI), and reinstate the insulin pump therapy program for Albertans with diabetes.

Twenty years ago, members of the labour movement and civil society founded Public Interest Alberta: to build active citizens to hold the government accountable to act in the public interest. Now more than ever, this mission is critical to build a better future for all Albertans – not just a select few.

This year at Public Interest Alberta, we've focused on getting out across the province to reach Albertans where they live and to listen to their stories and give them the tools they need to make changes in their communities. We've hosted trainings, workshops, summits and townhalls to share the skills our communities need to make change. We've hit the streets and talked to hundreds of Albertans about how they can get involved in creating a just future for all.

We will never back down from this mission until every Albertan has the life they deserve – a life of dignity, opportunity, and prosperity.

 **Are you with us?**

VISION & MISSION

Public Interest Alberta envisions a **just future for all Albertans**. To achieve this, Public Interest Alberta advocates for the **strengthening of public spaces, services, and institutions in Albertans’ lives**. We build power with and through a network of people and organizations committed to advancing the public interest to government, corporations, civil organizations, and the public.

WE BELIEVE...



OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

We believe that active citizens interacting with their democratically-elected and accountable governments are central to change in Alberta. **We focus mainly on building active citizens through public awareness campaigns;** however, by monitoring and responding to governments’ actions, **we create opportunities for Albertans to hold governments accountable.** Through our task forces, we create tables where different activists, organizations, labour groups and passionate members of the public can share information and coordinate their advocacy work. We build and support existing coalitions and alliances who are either driving change or working to overcome systemic barriers.

OUR GOALS

- Strengthen our collective power:** We will broaden our base and support our staff, board members and task forces so that they can sustain their work. We will be leaders in building the movement.
- Effectively influence decision makers:** We will impact government policy in key areas identified by our task forces and partners. We will be seen as a credible and trusted voice on public interest and public service to the media. We want more Albertans to know about us, respect our policy alternatives and be mobilized by our campaigns and events.
- Reflect the diversity of Alberta:** We wish to see greater diversity on our board and task forces, while reaching a more diverse audience.



Public Interest Alberta

By the Numbers



7
Task Forces



43
Task Force Meetings



80
Media Mentions

10.9k
Newsletter Subscribers



Over
6000
Social Media Followers
Across Channels

20k
Unique Website Visitors



453.6K impressions on social media



Where We've Been

2022 2023

SEPTEMBER 2022



PIA hosted a keynote with **Angella MacEwan**, the Senior Economist with CUPE National and a fellow at the Broadbent Institute.

- PIA hosted a webinar on renters' rights and the dire need for rent control in the midst of a housing and homelessness crisis with Alberta ACORN and Climate Justice Edmonton.

“We are in the grips of an affordability crisis, and its toll on renters is disproportionate.

We need to demand that all political parties make renter protections a priority. We need rent rate increase caps, landlord licensing, no-fault eviction protections, and the expansion of non-market and community housing.

Together, we can (and will) make the changes we need for a better Alberta for all.

We can't afford not to.”

OCTOBER
2022

PIA teamed up with the Alberta Federation of Labour, the Canadian Labour Congress, Friends of Medicare, and the Parkland Institute for the **Better Way Alberta Speaking Tour**. The tour hit the road and spoke to hundreds of Albertans in their communities with stops in Calgary, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, and Edmonton. We published **10 reports and issue sheets** on health care, post-secondary education, K-12 education, inequality, revenue reform, the economy and the job market, the cost of living, retirement security and the Canada Pension Plan, workers' rights and COVID safety



“There is a better way. Alberta needs a plan that will bring stability and new opportunities to our province – to ensure all Albertans have the tools they need to live and build a better future here. We can be ready to take on the changing economy and create stable, good paying jobs and secure retirements for working Albertans. It starts with investing in workers.”

NOVEMBER
2022



PIA and the Post-Secondary Education Task Force hosted a speaking tour stop in Athabasca to discuss the critical issues facing the staff, students, and faculty at Athabasca University.

“Much like PIA, we spend a lot of time talking about public healthcare and education, but we’re also talking about a lot of the other important issues facing Alberta. We have a lot of conversations and research these days around energy transitions and what is the future of Alberta’s economy. And so, we try very much to keep the public interest in our research agenda” said [Parkland Institute Director] Jason Foster, who has also been associated with AU as a tutor and faculty member for 20 years.

“And it seems like AU has been in crisis for almost 20 years, especially in the last 10. Some of it has been manufactured either to manipulate us as staff or the government, but some of it has been real, and we’ve seen, particularly in the last decade, declining government grants, rising tuition for students, and definitely staff are stretched thinner and ever thinner, trying to do more constantly with less.”

PIA published an op-ed in the Edmonton Journal on the dire need for municipal investment to solve the housing crisis.



We are in a full-blown crisis. Homelessness has more than doubled since 2019. On Nov. 14, 811 people slept outdoors and 2,665 people were experiencing homelessness of every type. Nearly 20 per cent of these people identified as youth, and almost half identified as Indigenous.

These numbers from Homeward Trust’s By the Name data tell the story of thousands of examples of policy failure and inaction. It’s truly heartbreaking and it’s infuriating to community members and advocates who have experienced homelessness or



toiled for years and decades as things have gone from bad to worse.

But in this budget cycle, we have a generational opportunity to plant seeds that will bring forward federal, provincial, and municipal resources to start adequately responding to the crisis we see in our streets and in the valley every day.”

PIA’s Child Care and Early Education Task Force hosted a press conference and day of action to address the shortage of early childhood educators (ECEs) in the child care workforce.

“Child care advocates across the country celebrated our historic win last year. The provincial government finally listened to our advocacy for affordability in child care and signed a historic agreement with the federal government. However, the work is far from over to create a sustainable system of child care that not only addresses the cost to parents, but also the working conditions of ECEs.

“Throughout their tenure in the legislature, the UCP have hammered the child care sector with cuts. Combined with low wages and challenging work environments, this has meant that there is a major shortage of ECEs in the province. This is a problem that needs to be addressed now if we ever hope to build a truly high quality, affordable, and accessible system of child care. The UCP must reverse their cuts and invest in the child care workforce. The working conditions of ECEs become the care conditions for Alberta kids.”



PIA delivered a keynote address to the Alberta Federation of Labour’s Labour Forward Training Conference.

In response to the advocacy of the child care sector, the provincial government announced a wage top-up for early childhood educators (ECEs).



“Today, following sustained advocacy from the child care sector, the Government of Alberta announced a one-time payment and modest wage top-up for Alberta’s Early Childhood Educators, effective January 2023. While child care advocates are happy to see some investment into the wages of this critical workforce, the policy does not go far enough to address the working conditions of ECEs in the province.

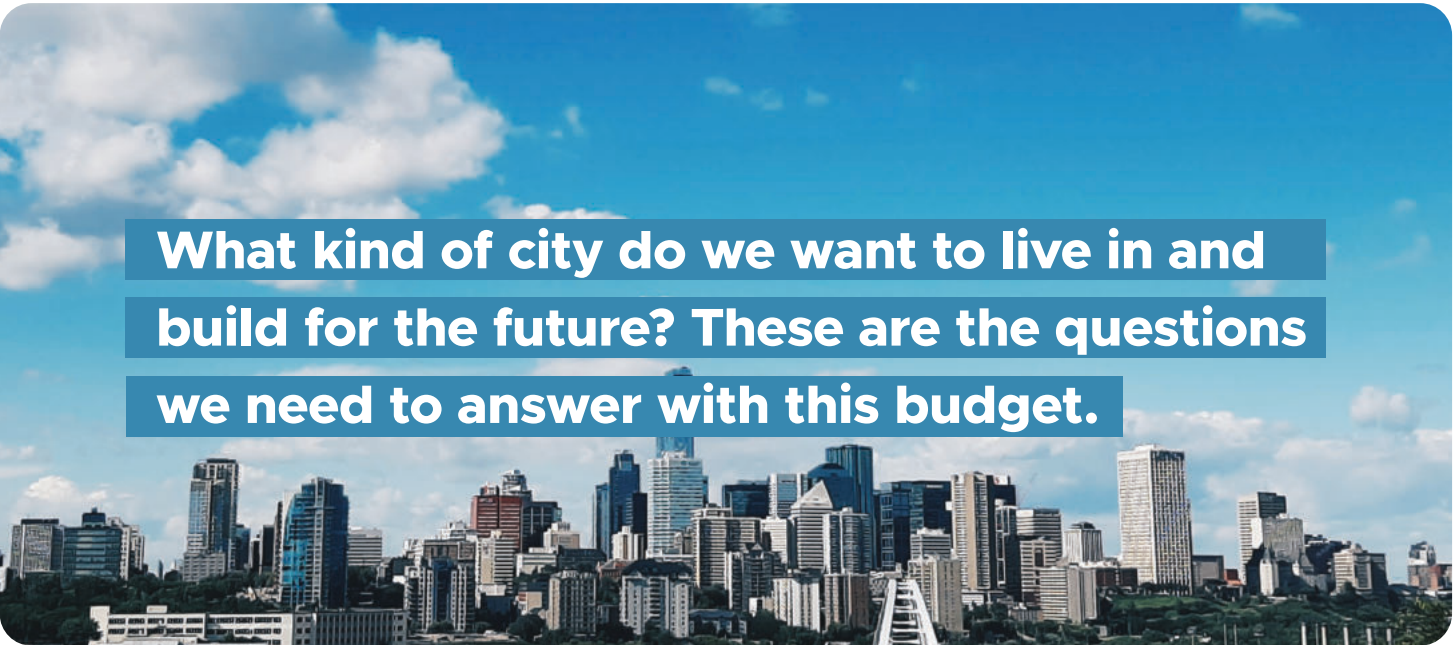
Today’s announcement shows that advocacy works, but there’s still so much more to be done,” said Bradley Lafortune, Executive Director of Public Interest Alberta. “While a one-time payment and wage top-up is welcome news, low wages and inadequate employee benefits, including pensions, will continue to drive people, mostly women, out of the child care field.”

“The provincial government must establish a salary grid with competitive wages and benefits for ECEs,” added Lafortune. “Anything less is a band-aid and won’t solve the workforce challenges we’re seeing.”



PIA urged Edmonton City Council to prioritize investment into housing during budget deliberations.

“Budgets are all about priorities. There’s no doubt that the chaos at the provincial level has negatively impacted municipalities’ ability to do their jobs effectively. However, the City Council is not helpless. Prioritizing housing is a long-term investment into the kind of city we can all be proud to live in - one that values the lives and dignity of all Edmontonians and enables everyone to thrive.”



What kind of city do we want to live in and build for the future? These are the questions we need to answer with this budget.



PIA emerged as a leading voice in civil society criticizing the UCP’s dismal failure to adequately address the cost-of-living crisis.

“Albertans are suffering under this affordability crisis. Food banks can’t keep food on their shelves. Homelessness has more than doubled across the province, and families are sinking further and further into debt. Albertans deserve better than sleepless nights with their stomachs in knots wondering how they will pay their utility bills, feed their families, or make rent or mortgage payments.

“While the \$100 per month for 6 months offered to seniors, AISH recipients, and children will provide some temporary relief, it will not address the problem at the root. Albertans are suffering with sky-rocketing costs as grocery stores and utility companies are posting record-breaking profits. The pay gap between CEOs and Canadian workers recently hit an all-time high.

“What is the UCP government doing about runaway inequality? Nothing. Instead, they’re continuing to line shareholder pockets with tax breaks and corporate welfare.”

PIA, Friends of Medicare, and researcher Dr. Euan Thomson released data on the drug poisoning crisis and demanded the UCP retract their claims that their drug policy was (and continues to be) anything less than an absolute failure.

“Every one of these mortality statistics is a real person with a family history and a story, and our hearts go out to everyone impacted by this crisis and the government’s misleading and callous approach to it. Not only is the mortality data released by the province chronically late, but it is also false – we fear the worst is yet to come unless we allow more options for people who use drugs.

“The UCP approach is failing Albertans and people are dying because of it. We can’t afford to follow this dangerous experiment any longer. We need evidence-based, data driven, and compassionate strategies to ensure lives are saved and people are supported.


“Now that we know these numbers were far worse than the province first presented, it’s time for the government to abandon its failing abstinence-only approach. We need a public health based approach that includes things such as safe supply, supervised consumption services, and other evidence-based harm reduction strategies.”

PIA spearheaded an initiative to engage with Edmonton’s Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Sikora, on the urgent need for interventions in the housing and homelessness crisis and presented a comprehensive plan to Edmonton City Council.


“Today reconfirmed what we’ve known all along: that housing is healthcare and the UCP government’s current approach is harming our communities and straining our healthcare system. The UCP’s lack of investment has created an emergency by design. Today we are raising the alarm: we need urgent and substantial investments in evidence-based and upstream solutions now.”

Public Interest Alberta joined community members and the Alberta Health Services delegation at Edmonton’s Community and Public Services Committee meeting with city councillors, chaired by Councillor Tim Cartmell.

At the meeting, Public Interest Alberta stressed the urgent need to:




Scrap the UCP’s affordable housing framework
“Stronger Foundations”



Develop and enforce minimum shelter standards



Invest in permanent supportive housing and housing supports across the spectrum;



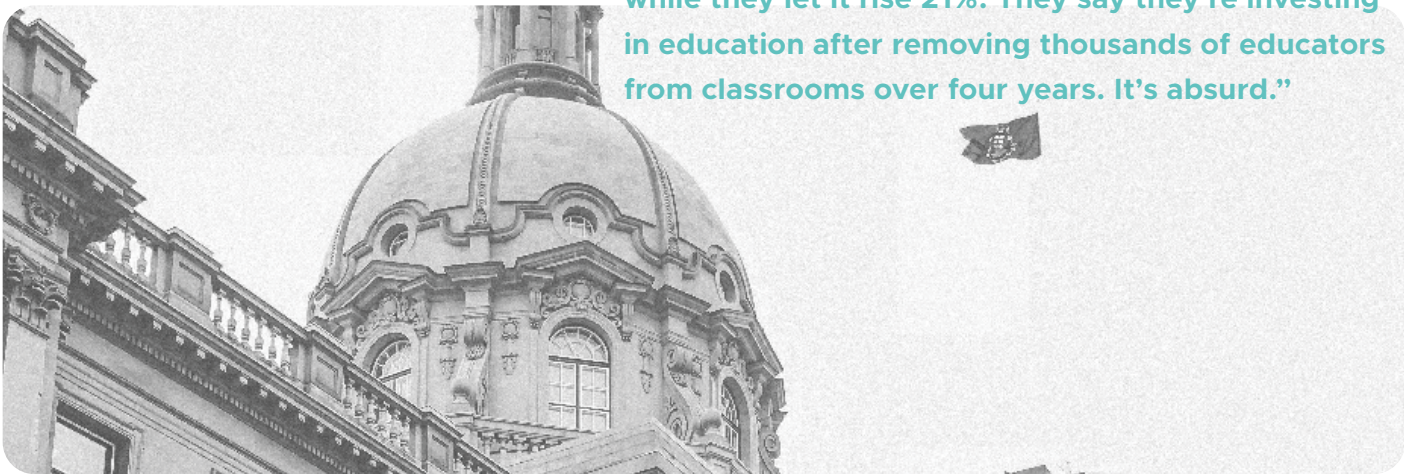
Invest in wrap-around services and system navigation to ensure housing security and dignity for Edmontonians.

PIA loudly criticized the UCP’s blatant election budget.

“For the second year in a row, the budget is balanced — on the backs of Albertans. In it, we’ve got a tale of two Albertas: an Alberta where the already-wealthy thrive, and an Alberta where regular people struggle to put food on the table, gas in their car, and a roof over their head.

“Throughout the budget we see robust investment in one very particular way — into the pockets of wealthy shareholders, CEOs, and private interests. Be it through massive public giveaways to for-profit surgical clinics and privately-held charter schools, or through the lowest corporate tax rate in the country, Smith and the UCP continue to prove their allegiance to corporate profits over the well-being and livelihoods of every day Albertans.”

“So many of the so-called highlights of this budget are the UCP covering their tracks before an election. The UCP are proudly proclaiming decisions like increases to AISH and other income supports. Do they expect us to forget they slashed it over the last 3 years? They brag that tuition will be capped while they let it rise 21%. They say they’re investing in education after removing thousands of educators from classrooms over four years. It’s absurd.”



MARCH
2023

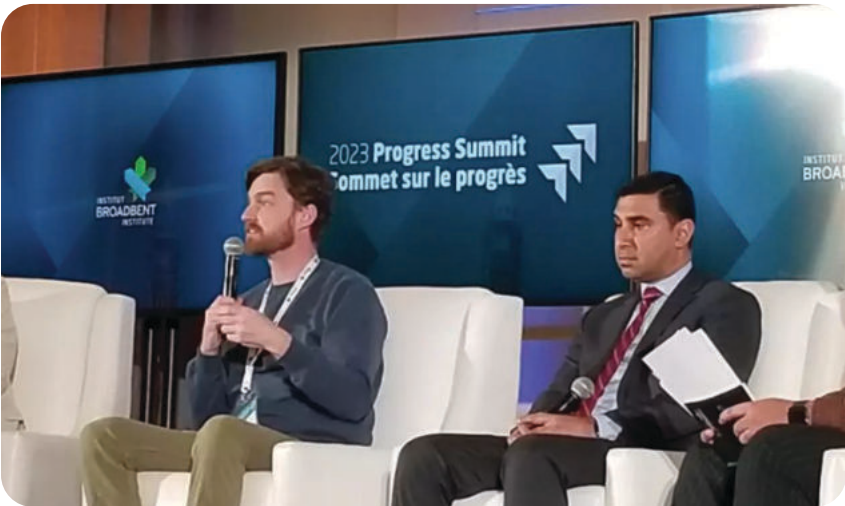
PIA teamed up with the Campus Food Bank to demand an end to pandemic profiteering as grocery store CEOs, including Loblaw's CEO Galen Weston, were summoned to testify before Parliament about the astronomical price of food.



“ We need all levels of government to work together in the best interest of people above corporate profit — and that means curbing pandemic and inflation profiteering and taxing these corporations and wealthy shareholders so that all of us can access well-funded public services that make life more equitable for all, not just those who can afford to pay.

“Every Albertan deserves better than to be up with sleepless nights wondering how they will put food on the table. And quite frankly, how is it that these grocery store CEOs can sleep at night knowing that they are gouging families all across the country?”

PIA's Executive Director Bradley Lafortune was featured on a panel on international solidarity against the extreme right wing at the Broadbent Institute's Progress Summit in Ottawa alongside German Social Democrat Rasha Nasr, and Faiz Shakir, former Senior Advisor to Senator Bernie Sanders.



PIA marked the solemn third anniversary of the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic. PIA was proud to stand alongside members of the Seniors Task Force, the Alberta Federation of Labour, the Health Sciences Association of Alberta, the United Nurses of Alberta, and Friends of Medicare to commemorate the over 5000 Albertans we have lost, and to demand urgent action to support those suffering with Long COVID.

PIA published an op-ed in the Edmonton Journal on the dire need for an overhaul in seniors' care in Alberta.

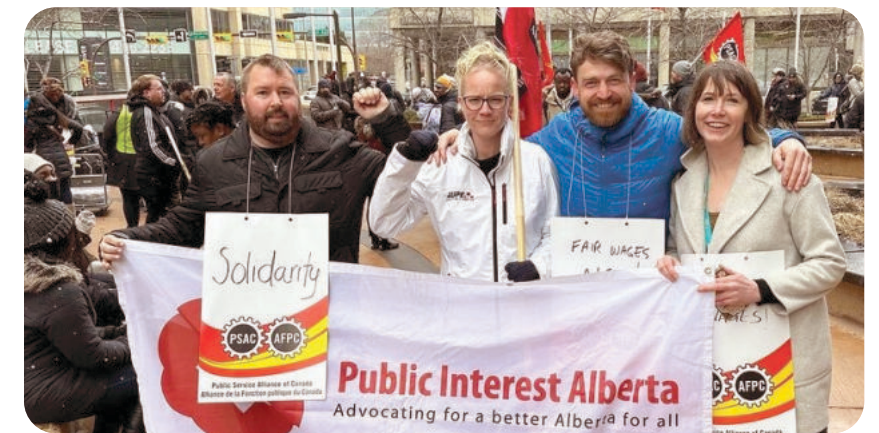


“ As seniors, we want access to services that allow us to live safely with dignity and comfort regardless of where we live in the province or our personal income. The rampant privatization of seniors' congregate-care facilities, the lack of enforceable long-term care standards, deficient staffing standards and the lack of an independent office of a seniors' advocate provides clear evidence that the current government does not support seniors in Alberta. The entire continuing-care and long-term care systems are rooted in ageism and neglect.”

APRIL
2023

PIA celebrated 20 years of bold progressive advocacy. We hosted a **Gala Dinner & Silent Auction** that reflected on PIA's past and looked forward to the next 20 years. Special guests included past executive directors, labour leaders, and a special musical performance by folk music icon Maria Dunn.

20 years of BOLD PROGRESSIVE ADVOCACY




PIA stood with the 120,000 Public Service Alliance of Canada workers on strike for a fair contract. The strike was victorious after nearly two weeks. A victory for the public sector is a victory for all!

PIA hosted a press conference with the Edmonton Public Teachers Local 37, Support Our Students Alberta, and CUPE Alberta to demand all provincial parties invest in the staff, students, and teachers in public schools in Alberta in advance of the provincial election.

“Public education is a cornerstone of our public institutions that all Albertans need and rely on. Albertans deserve better than the cuts, chaos and privatization that has characterized the past four years under the UCP government. We are proud to stand with teachers, workers, parents, students and experts, working together to demand an Alberta for all.”

MAY
2023

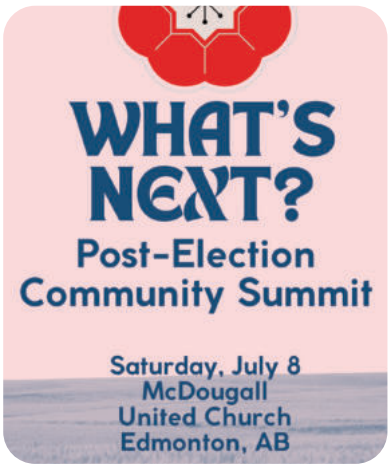
- The writ dropped in Alberta for the provincial election.
- PIA compiled a list of over 350 examples of UCP cuts, chaos, and blunders that is seen by hundreds of thousands of Albertans on social media.
- PIA released Priorities for Change for K-12 education, full-day kindergarten, child care and early learning, post-secondary education, seniors' care, and the Canada Pension Plan. The priorities documents were sent to every political party.
- PIA pushed the progressive agenda, calling out all political parties for failing to live up to the priorities needed to create an **Alberta for all**.



“We need to dream bigger. We don’t even see conversations about tuition rollbacks, let alone big ideas like tuition-free post-secondary – why not? It happens all over the world. Why not here?”

- PIA and Climate Justice Edmonton hosted a leaders’ debate watch party at Bent Stick Brewing in Edmonton.
- The first event watch party at Bent Stick Brewery was such a success that PIA and CJE hosted an election night watch party too.

JUNE
2023



After the UCP’s narrow victory, PIA announced the What’s Next: Community Summit and spent the month of June planning it with collaboration from Friends of Medicare, Council of Canadians, the Climate Emergency Unit, and Support our Students.

- To mark Alberta Seniors’ Week, PIA and Friends of Medicare renewed their call for the return of an independent Seniors’ Advocate, for Alberta to get on board with universal pharmacare, and for a comprehensive system of service delivery that ensures the well-being of seniors by ensuring their mental, physical, social and financial needs are met.



- PIA joined Climate Justice Edmonton and other environmental organizations to demand urgent action from the federal government on the climate crisis.

**JULY
2023**

PIA hosted the **What's Next: Post-Election Community Summit**.

The zero-cost event featured a packed agenda including:



A blessing and greeting from Elder Roxann Sunwalker Roan



An election debrief facilitated by community activist Kyla Fisher



A delicious lunch catered by Tee Pee Treats

4 breakout training sessions:



Bystander Intervention Training led by the Fyrefly Institute for Gender and Sexual Diversity's Rural Education Coordinator Alexandra Marshall



One-on-One Organizing Conversations led by climate organizer Juan Vargas



Issues-based Campaigning led by labour activist Brendan Bruce



Storytelling for Advocates by PIA's Director of Communications and Organizing Laura Kruse

A panel featuring women and gender-diverse voices from labour and civil society on how we maintain hope in organizing and political change. The panel was moderated by **Adrienne King** and featured:



Wing Li, Director of Communications of Support Our Students



Dylan Sloan, labour activist



Donna Staszewski, Chair of the PIA Child Care and Early Learning Task Force

**AUGUST
2023**

As a follow-up to the What's Next: Post-Election Summit, PIA and partners including Council of Canadians and Support Our Students hosted a Day of Action and Community BBQ.

Dozens of participants gathered together by the Strathcona Community League to participate in a canvass training and kick off the campaign for a better Alberta for all as we resist the cuts and chaos of the UCP and demand better for our communities. After the participants practiced canvassing for an hour, they returned to a delicious BBQ and we enjoyed a few hours of social time in a public park. We fed passers-by and all who wanted to join us!





Where We're Going

We know what we need to do to build an **Alberta for all.**

Each of our task force chairs submitted their top priorities for the coming year:

CHILD CARE & EARLY LEARNING

- Advocating for full-day kindergarten
- Working with other early learning and child care advocacy groups to ensure that the Canada-Alberta Cost Control Framework agreement fulfills the promise of high-quality child care at \$10/day for ALL children.
- Pushing government to restore funding for early intervention programs which were cut by the UCP, such as Program Unit Funding (PUF) for children with mild, moderate and severe needs

DEMOCRACY

- Forming the CPPWG (Canada Pension Plan Working Group) to create a campaign to defend the CPP from the UCP's plans to move to an Alberta Pension Plan.
- Researching and campaigning for alternative options to first-past-the-post elections in Alberta, and for fairer municipal government elections (such as ranked ballots).

ENVIRONMENT

- Advocating for meaningful emissions caps and robust public investment into renewable energy and a just transition
- Collaborating with national and provincial organizations to demand an end to public subsidies of the fossil fuel industry, as well as windfall taxes for record industry profits
- Bringing to light the connection between the climate crisis, the cost-of-living crisis, and the housing crisis through public-facing advocacy efforts and campaigns in collaboration with other climate-focused groups

HUMAN SERVICES & POVERTY

- Advocating for a provincial living wage
- Demanding rent control and more protections for renters
- Expanding income supports such as AISH and Alberta Works

K-12 EDUCATION

- Embedding class size and composition into negotiated collective agreements with teachers and education workers.
- Phasing out all funding to private schools and homeschooling with funds redirected to public schools, and incorporating charter schools within existing School Boards.
- Abandoning the current government's curriculum and curriculum revision process and beginning a review process that is supported by those engaged in curriculum implementation at the school/classroom levels.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

- Decolonizing and Indigenizing our post-secondary institutions
- Reversing past policies that have transferred more of the costs of post-secondary education onto students and staff
- Reforming the governance of post-secondary institutions to focus on the public interest

SENIORS

- Continuing to advocate for an Independent Office of the Seniors Advocate reporting directly to the legislature.
- Developing a Bill of Rights for Alberta Seniors as the foundation for a comprehensive system of services for seniors.
- Improving the quality of care for seniors in seniors' congregate care facilities, at home and in communities through increased comprehensive, publicly-delivered services.



Financial Statement

Year-Ending March 31st 2023

REVENUE

	2023	2022
Membership Fees	297,567	306,551
Donations	4,160	3,134
In-Kind Contributions	354	442
Campaign Income	36,003	--
Speaker Honorarium	200	34,127
Conference	5,000	--
Interest Income	161	304
	343,445	344,558

OPERATING EXPENSES

	2023	2022
Staffing	273,957	257,528
Communications & Outreach	19,428	22,737
Rent	32,825	32,016
Equipment/Software	1,001	
Telecommunications	5,464	4,916
Office Supplies	470	384
Audit Fees	8,531	7,980
Amortization	2,224	2,924
Insurance	2,103	2,053
Business Taxes and Licenses	45	23
Interest and Bank Charges	2,162	2,737
Annual General Meeting	111	132
Board/Executive	88	4,623
Affiliations	1,064	565
WCB	504	120
Achievements/Service Awards		1,045
Miscellaneous	686	
	350,663	339,783

PROGRAM COSTS

	2023	2022
Education	111	-
Human Services & Poverty Task Force		50
Post-Secondary Education Task Force	1,679	78
Seniors' Task Force		70
General Advocacy Campaigns	11,984	53,359
Conference (2023)	563	
Conference (2022)		132
	14,337	53,689

	2023	2022
Total Expenses	365,000	393,472
Surplus/Deficit	-21,555	-48,914

BOARD MEMBERS

Terry Price, President

Alison McIntosh, Vice-President

Mike Parker, Vice-President, Health Sciences Association of Alberta

Jonathan Teghtmeyer, Treasurer, Alberta Teachers' Association

Donna Staszewski, Secretary

Gil McGowan, Director, Alberta Federation of Labour

Guy Smith, Director, Alberta Union of Provincial Employees

Heather Smith, Director, United Nurses of Alberta

Rory Gill, Director, CUPE Alberta Division

Sheldon Kerr, Director, United Utilities Workers' Association

Quinn Benders, Director, UofA Non-Academic Staff Association

Carol Wodak, Director, Seniors' Action and Liaison Team

Collin Anderson, Director, Alberta Federation of Union Retirees

Greg Mady, Director, Edmonton & District Labour Council

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

Chris Gallaway, Friends of Medicare

Ricardo Acuña, Parkland Institute

STAFF

Bradley Lafortune, Executive Director

Deanne Timmons, Finance and Administration Officer

Laura Kruse, Director of Communications and Organizing

ADVOCATING FOR A BETTER ALBERTA FOR ALL



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Public Interest Alberta

2022 – 2023