



Alberta Budget 2020: Community and Social Services and Children's Services updates and their Impacts on ALIGN members and other community service agencies

March 4, 2020

February 27, 2020 marked the announcement of the 2020 Alberta budget. The focus of this budget highlighted the drive for a balanced budget through means of reduced government operation spending, modernizing service delivery, and reprofiling expenditures. Finance Minister Toews described the goal of this budget as providing for the most vulnerable, ensuring sustainability of public services in the future, and creating a foundation for economic prosperity for the future of Alberta¹. The overview of this budget provided by the Government of Alberta described its four focus areas as “getting services to people who need them, getting Alberta back to work, getting spending under control, and getting a fair deal”².

Community and Social Services

The Alberta Government has stated that \$3.9 billion on this budget will be allocated for community and social services which is in line with the past spending by this government³. The 2020 budget for this ministry highlighted spending of “\$135 million budgeted in 2020-21 for Community Supports and Family Safety, which includes a new \$7 million Civil Society Empowerment Fund to support non-profit organizations and charities to address pressing social challenges (ALIGN is currently working to get clarity around this funds purpose and will provide a follow-up once more information is available), and an additional \$1.2 million for sexual assault services”, as well as “an additional \$5 million to build on successful partnerships supporting employment opportunities for Albertans with disabilities”⁴. The goal of this budget was stated as “participation and inclusion of Albertans in their communities by helping them access disability and employment services, financial supports, homeless services and supports for Albertans fleeing domestic and sexual violence”⁵

¹ https://docs.assembly.ab.ca/LADDAR_files/docs/hansards/han/legislature_30/session_2/20200227_1330_01_han.pdf

² <https://www.alberta.ca/budget-highlights.aspx#p5360s1>

³ <https://www.alberta.ca/budget-highlights.aspx#p5360s1>

⁴ <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/05bd4008-c8e3-4c84-949e-cc18170bc7f7/resource/79caa22e-e417-44bd-8cac-64d7bb045509/download/budget-2020-fiscal-plan-2020-23.pdf>

⁵ <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/05bd4008-c8e3-4c84-949e-cc18170bc7f7/resource/79caa22e-e417-44bd-8cac-64d7bb045509/download/budget-2020-fiscal-plan-2020-23.pdf>



The Alberta Government has indicated that the 2019-2020 budget for Community and Social Services was underspent by \$63 million, citing changes to benefits delivery as the primary cause. This statement specifically addresses the changes to payments that came at the end of 2019 whereby payments are not received by benefits recipients until the first of each month, rather than four business days prior to the beginning of the month. The resulting shift for many has been missed rent and bill payments, and fines as a result, as many did not have savings in place to account for the sudden shift⁶.

Budget 2020 also stated that spending in Community and Social Services (specifically citing AISH, FSCD, and PDD) over the past four years has outpaced both inflation and population growth, and that spending for AISH was higher than other provinces. This statement relates back to the changes made to AISH in 2019 where the Alberta government put a stop to indexing by inflation, a system utilized by the previous government. This has resulted in a \$30/month decrease in AISH benefits over the next few years, accounting for a \$120/month decrease by 2023⁷.

There has been some opposition to this budget. On February 26, 2020 during Question Period, one day prior to the budget announcement, MLA and Opposition Critic for Community and Social Services Marie Renaud urged Minister Sahwney to reverse the changes to benefits delivery dates (the change stated in the 2020 budget that saved \$63 million in the 2019 budget), citing concerns expressed by benefits recipients over missed bill and rent payments, as well as an indicated lack of consultation with AISH recipients on this issue⁸. The Minister stated that no changes would be made, and that benefits recipients with concerns should contact their caseworks, or Alberta Supports offices⁹.

It should be noted that Budget 2020 provided very little insight into funding and legislation around PDD and FSCD, with the exception of indicating a slight increase in funding for disability services, and noting that caseloads has increased by 14% and 30% respectively between 2015 and 2019. As further information on these two programs becomes available, ALIGN will provide a follow-up.

⁶ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/aish-payment-change-schedule-1.5484589>

⁷ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/it-really-upsets-me-aish-recipients-worry-about-halt-to-indexing-1.5350899>

⁸ https://docs.assembly.ab.ca/LADDAR_files/docs/hansards/han/legislature_30/session_2/20200226_1330_01_han.pdf, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/aish-payment-change-schedule-1.5484589>, <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/05bd4008-c8e3-4c84-949e-cc18170bc7f7/resource/79caa22e-e417-44bd-8cac-64d7bb045509/download/budget-2020-fiscal-plan-2020-23.pdf>

⁹ https://docs.assembly.ab.ca/LADDAR_files/docs/hansards/han/legislature_30/session_2/20200226_1330_01_han.pdf



Children's Services

The Alberta Government has stated that \$1.6 billion on this budget will be allocated for Children's Services with projected increases to spending to \$1.7 billion by 2022-23¹⁰. The goal of this budget was stated as "ensuring that children, youth and families in Alberta are provided with the services and supports they need to thrive in healthy families and communities"¹¹

The Alberta Government indicated that the 2019-2020 budget for Children's Services was underspent by \$26 million, citing changes such as transitioning child protection caseloads to kinship caregivers, lower kinship care expenses, and changes to child care benefits¹².

In 2019 the Alberta Government began changes to child protection services where emphasis would be put on placing children in the care of extended family members in situations where children had to leave the care of their parents or primary caregivers. Minister Schulz stated that this would be the preferred direction of the ministry, and the 2020 budget has cited the effectiveness of this strategy at lowering child protection caseworker loads, being more cost effective, and providing better outcomes for children who can continue to live within their own culture¹³. The 2020 budget also mentioned a willingness to work collaboratively with the federal government in response to Bill C-92 An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families, which came into effect January 1, 2020¹⁴. No other details have been provided by this ministry as to what this will look like. Additionally, the 2020 budget emphasized their focus on front-line staff retention and wellness, legal permanency, supports for children ageing out of care through mentoring supports and Advancing Futures, and investing in prevention and early intervention strategies¹⁵. The remarks around ageing out of care supports (for which \$13 million was allocated in the 2020 budget) come after the 2019 decision to limit the age for access to programs and services from 24 to 22, a move that some social workers

¹⁰ <https://www.alberta.ca/budget-highlights.aspx#p5360s1>, <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/05bd4008-c8e3-4c84-949e-cc18170bc7f7/resource/79caa22e-e417-44bd-8cac-64d7bb045509/download/budget-2020-fiscal-plan-2020-23.pdf>

¹¹ <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/05bd4008-c8e3-4c84-949e-cc18170bc7f7/resource/79caa22e-e417-44bd-8cac-64d7bb045509/download/budget-2020-fiscal-plan-2020-23.pdf>

¹² <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/05bd4008-c8e3-4c84-949e-cc18170bc7f7/resource/79caa22e-e417-44bd-8cac-64d7bb045509/download/budget-2020-fiscal-plan-2020-23.pdf>

¹³ <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/politics/keith-gerein-column-14>, <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/05bd4008-c8e3-4c84-949e-cc18170bc7f7/resource/79caa22e-e417-44bd-8cac-64d7bb045509/download/budget-2020-fiscal-plan-2020-23.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/05bd4008-c8e3-4c84-949e-cc18170bc7f7/resource/79caa22e-e417-44bd-8cac-64d7bb045509/download/budget-2020-fiscal-plan-2020-23.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/05bd4008-c8e3-4c84-949e-cc18170bc7f7/resource/79caa22e-e417-44bd-8cac-64d7bb045509/download/budget-2020-fiscal-plan-2020-23.pdf>



called “short sighted” due to the limited funding for adult programs such as PDD¹⁶. Although there was little mention of changes to child care and the child care pilot (\$25/day child care), early intervention programs, and Alberta Child Benefit (being replaced by the Alberta Child and Family benefit), operational expenses show a decrease in spending in all of these areas¹⁷. These changes to funding follow the elimination of two child care subsidies (kin child care and stay-at-home) earlier this year (as they were announced in 2019), the announcement of changes to child care subsidies whereby income limits would change, the announcement of a new EOI for early intervention program delivery following the termination of nearly 450 grants and nearly 300 contracts which supported such services as Parent Link Centres, mentorship initiatives, Community Resource Centres, Early Childhood Coalitions, community-based parent and family support, outreach services, and Home Visitation programs, effective March 2020, and the most recent announcement of the removal of accreditation processes for child care centres¹⁸.

Criticism of this budget has been largely focused around the changes to child care and child subsidies. MLA and Opposition Critic to Children’s Services Rakhi Pancholi took to social media following the budget to address the many Albertans who contacted herself and the ministry to express their disappointment, and concerns over access to affordable child care¹⁹.

Do you have comments or concerns regarding the 2020 budget? Visit https://www.assembly.ab.ca/lao/mla/mla_help.htm to find the contact details for your local MLA.

¹⁶ <https://www.thestar.com/edmonton/2019/10/31/former-youth-in-care-in-alberta-will-soon-be-cut-off-from-childrens-services-at-22-not-24.html>, <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/05bd4008-c8e3-4c84-949e-cc18170bc7f7/resource/79caa22e-e417-44bd-8cac-64d7bb045509/download/budget-2020-fiscal-plan-2020-23.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/05bd4008-c8e3-4c84-949e-cc18170bc7f7/resource/79caa22e-e417-44bd-8cac-64d7bb045509/download/budget-2020-fiscal-plan-2020-23.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://edmontonsocialplanning.ca/fact-sheet-2020-alberta-provincial-budget/>, <https://calgary.ctvnews.ca/it-s-just-not-right-preschool-operators-say-subsidy-cuts-devastate-families-1.4677293>, <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/childrens-services-cancelling-hundreds-of-service-contracts-for-parenting-help-to-revamp-network>, <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=68591142B66CC-0065-1B9A-475551AB6F2E2E1E>, <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/politics/childrens-services-to-ditch-child-care-accreditation-process>

¹⁹ https://www.instagram.com/p/B8_sLg-g2OF/, https://twitter.com/pancholi_rakhi/status/1233166164336922624