

Briefing note for Children's Services Ministry Meeting - March 14, 2022
Request for Cost of Living One Time Only Injection of Funds
for Alberta Foster and Kinship Caregivers

Purpose:

The purpose of this briefing note is to present a recommendation to provide a one-time injection of financial support to Alberta foster and kinship caregivers to assist with offsetting some of the current increases in extraordinary expenses.

Background:

Caregivers have not had an increase in their basic maintenance fees for 3 years and we do not have a plan for negotiating this in the near future. Families have absorbed costs throughout the pandemic in areas of food, child care, and time off from work due to isolation. Concurrently, the cost of day-to-day living has steadily increased.

Current Situation:

There has been discussion and concern, at both the department and agency level of foster/kinship care, regarding the significant increase in the daily cost of living for caregivers. These increases have been seen throughout the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, but most significantly in the last few months.

A survey was sent out to caregivers across the province and over 400 responded. 70% of those outlined extraordinary costs currently impacting them. From the survey the highest impacts are in groceries, gas and utilities.

It is important to note that the survey question was designed as to not elicit an expected response, and some caregivers reported not knowing what the question was asking (eg. what is an extraordinary response). Therefore, those who answered "no" to the survey question may have not understood the question being asked.

Extraordinary Costs of Living - A Caregiver Data Study - March 2022						
Data Based on 293 Responses Answering Yes						
Utilities	Gas/Fuel	Groceries/Food	Respite/Childcare	Recreation	Insurance	Clothing
166	174	212	21	25	33	24

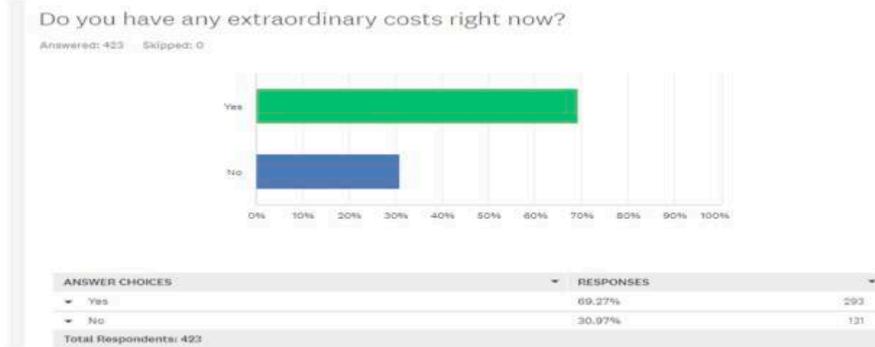
Additional Mentioned Costs

Medical: 18
 Maintenance (Home/Car): 4
 Psychiatrist: 4

Notes:

Based on questions and inquiries on this survey, it is uncertain if the responses to "No" are related to misunderstanding of the question or if they actually have not have this experie

Image/Chart Representation of Extraordinary Costs (Yes versus No)



Rationale for Request:

The request for an injection of funding for caregivers is being made for the following reasons:

1. The cost of daily living has significantly increased and is expected to continue increasing.

The cost of living in Alberta saw an inflation rate of 4.8 per cent overall in January and February 2022. The cost of energy, however was up 32 per cent from the same period in 2021. Transportation costs have increased 10.3 per cent. Food costs have increased by 5.7 per cent and shelter increasing by 5.5 per cent.

Approximately six months ago, grocery prices increased significantly and now a typical family of four can expect to be paying \$220 more each month for healthy food, compared to last year. That's according to Vibrant Communities Calgary, which calculates costs in the city as part of its annual living wage report. It released that report on November 1, 2021. Researchers found prices in many areas increased with inflation, but food prices increased faster. Now a family with two adults and two kids can expect to spend nearly \$1,200 a month to ensure a full fridge and kitchen cupboards.

The University of Alberta School of Economics stated on CTV news, March 10, 2022, that groceries are expected to increase another 8 per cent this year, which is about \$1,000 over the next year for an average family.

Energy experts say Albertans can expect to receive high energy bills for the remainder of the year with commodities expected to near or reach record levels (Global News). This data highlights the current and future challenges Albertans are facing, which is and will be even more strongly impacting foster and kinship caregivers who are providing a home for those children and youth in the care of the Ministry.

2. Not only are they facing these extraordinary expense increases, caregivers have over the last 2 years absorbed many costs due to COVID-19 related expenses:
 - PPE (outside those initially supplied by Children's Services)
 - Extra Cleaning Supplies
 - Extra financial hardships during sick time and need for isolation (ie. the more individuals in the home, the more a family is impacted by this)
 - Increase in cost of groceries due to people being home more and eating more

In recognition of these extra costs, an injection of funding to support these increases would go a long way to support caregivers in providing for the children and youth in their care.

It would also be a way to recognize the caregivers as valuable providers for the children and youth in care, and assist with potential breakdowns due to financial concerns.

Recommendation:

It is recommended to provide each foster and kinship caregiver across Alberta, supporting the care of those children and youth under the care of Alberta Children's Services, with a one-time injection of funds to offset the current state of cost of living.

It is recommended this amount would be \$200/child in each home, as of December 31, 2021.

Future Discussions:

With the significant increases in cost of living expected moving forward, we would like to continue our conversation and negotiation in this next year to consider what can be done long term to support foster and kinship caregivers with these trends.

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