



Using your Voice for Vulnerable Albertans

#advocatesforchange

Alberta's next provincial election is scheduled for May 29, 2023.

Even though the election campaign has not yet officially begun, now is the time to become engaged in influencing political candidates and parties.

We encourage you to meet and talk with the candidates in your riding.

Emphasize the key messages. Take the time to make your interests known and tell your agency's story. Share the actions you expect the candidates in your riding and their parties if elected, to take that will improve the lives of vulnerable Albertans.

Our election strategy must broaden now. All candidates need to understand the issues in the sector. The specific asks will be made once there is a new government and new Minister.

The provincial government has recently made positive changes by re-indexing AISH and increasing wages for disability support workers, but we cannot afford to ignore the other equally pressing or greater issues impacting vulnerable Albertans.

Children deserve to be nurtured and protected - not abandoned by the Alberta government.

Families in Alberta are currently experiencing numerous challenges with a staggering rise in inflation, the cost of many basic needs including housing and power costs are increasing at a rate that is not feasible for most in this province. It is critical that we receive proper funding to child intervention services, early intervention and prevention, mental health and addictions, disability services and family supports. Children in care are the responsibility of the government and their care is outsourced to community-based organizations who are represented by ALIGN.

Our organizations work with families to assist them to remain together by focusing on holistic approaches to disabilities and mental health, that respond to trauma and support children. Unfortunately, this is not always possible, and children and families that need to come into care are placed into compassionate environments such as, kinship care, foster care, and group care. These are vital services for Albertans.

The cost of living has steadily increased while contract funding has not kept pace over the years therefore creating a reduction in funding. Any further reductions will result in the loss to family reunification, an increase to mental health and addiction concerns and an increased burden on society. Children in care are the responsibility of the government, they are their guardians and have a duty of care to ensure their most basic needs are met. The government is severely underfunding organizations that care for their children. We are service providers not guardians. These service providers are not helping Alberta families to make a profit, in fact over 95% are not-for-profit operations that are underfunded to the point of not receiving enough to pay their expenses and are operating at deficits.

As a result, any reduction to the child and family contracted agency sector will have an even more devastating effect on vulnerable children, and their families, which will further disrupt their lives and put them in greater jeopardy.

What would help Alberta's vulnerable children and families the most?

Use the below key messages to tell your agency's story. These are a springboard to talk about the experiences of your agency and keep the conversation focused. Use these as a basis to share your data and evidence.

Key message 1: Sustainable Funding for Community Services

Funding should be indexed, contracts be flexible, and grow as standards increase and operational costs rise.

- Since 2014, contract community group care service providers have received no increases in funding. Foster and kinship caregivers have not had an increase in more than 4 years
- Agencies are having to go into deficit, or close programs or agencies. They simply cannot afford to continue doing business. Agencies have no control over the rising costs and no longer have reserves to manage.
- Increases in the costs of insurance, WCB, utilities and staffing have far exceeded the rate of inflation.
- This is an unsustainable state for service providers, and an unmaintainable situation for vulnerable Albertans who rely on these services. Maintaining quality supports with funding shortfalls and workforce struggles is impossible. Children and staff are at risk.
- The Government of Alberta has provided an increase for disabilities services and has made steps in the right direction through re-indexing AISH. We need to keep this momentum moving forward and ensure the sector, as a whole, is provided sustainable funding.

Key message 2: Keep Services in Communities

A commitment by the Government of Alberta to focus on community-based service delivery with families, keeping children safe and in their homes and communities.

- Vulnerable children and families need access to support services in the communities where they live. This can be best achieved by commitment to a service delivery model that utilizes contracts with qualified local community agencies and focuses on family support and early intervention.
- Service delivery is most effective and efficient when delivered in communities by contracted agencies.
- Currently, contracted agencies provide 50% of foster care, 80% of group care, and 90% of all family support services in the province of Alberta.

Key message 3: Work together to ensure the most vulnerable Albertans have access to the services they need when they need them.

A commitment by the Government of Alberta to work together on policy initiatives to ensure research is used as the foundation and practise is provided by the professional workforce that exists.

- Community agencies and their appropriate member association are willing and able to work with government to strategize and develop ways of caring for vulnerable Albertans.
- Social issues like homelessness, addictions, opioid crisis, and poverty require investments. Community agencies can help solve some of these issues if we all work together.
- People with lived experience also need to be part of the solutions.



What YOU can do to make a difference.

We've made it easier for you to engage with Alberta politicians.

1. See the tools and tricks on our website <https://alignab.ca/category/alberta-budget-political-engagement/align-political-engagement//;>
2. Watch, like and share our social media campaign at
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/alignassociation/>
Twitter: <https://twitter.com/alignalberta>
Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/alignedmontonab/?hl=en>
Use these as springboards for your own social media campaigns and to share the story of your agency through thoughtful posts.
3. Arrange to visit your local candidates – use these key messages and tell your agencies story;
4. Use these key messages to have conversations with your staff and encouraged them to get involved and share their stories on social media and with candidates.
5. Attend candidate events in your neighbourhood.
6. Join ALIGN for candidate breakfasts.
<https://alignab.ca/align-ab-candidate-breakfasts-2023/>
7. Post questions on your door – ask door knockers how they feel about these issues, and whether they support the sector if they were to get elected.
8. Make sure everyone you know gets out to vote!

Ask all candidate to support investments to Community Service agencies we are vital to vulnerable Albertans. **We want to see our sector in election platforms.**

One voice so children, families and communities thrive.