



ACSW

Alberta College
of Social Workers

College des travailleurs
sociaux de l'Alberta

TOGETHER... THE COURAGE FOR CHANGE

April 18, 2013

The Honourable Alison Redford
Premier of Alberta
307 Legislature Building
10800 97 Avenue NW
Edmonton AB T5K 2B6

Dear Premier Redford:

Despite the collective and common wealth of Alberta, a significant number of groups and individuals continue to survive on the margins of society. As social workers, we frequently see the relentless and unnecessary, suffering of fellow Albertans who are living in poverty. We see hopes dashed, dreams delayed and choices limited. Ultimately, we see social dislocation, wasted potential and deep despair. But this does not have to be the case. These complex social problems can be solved – if the political and public will is in place.

Therefore, we were particularly excited by your promise last year to eliminate child poverty in our province in five years. We were also impressed by your increase in the amount of support provided to people by the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) program; yes, it still provides an inadequate income but it was a long overdue and welcome change. And we were also supportive of the consultative approach used in the creation of a social policy framework for our province. These are all important steps towards the elimination of poverty and creating opportunities for meaningful participation and social inclusion. Overall, eliminating poverty will not only help all Albertans reach their full potential, but will also help further the collective well-being and wealth of the entire province. A coordinated, sustainable and comprehensive approach to dealing with poverty will result in a win-win situation for all Albertans.

As social workers we know the cost of poverty in Alberta in economic terms alone has been estimated to be \$9 billion a year. The elimination of poverty requires a bold and comprehensive approach and an investment in poverty prevention as well as alleviation. Investing in prevention includes ensuring adequate financial support and appropriate housing for individuals and families, supporting quality early childhood education and child care, increasing opportunities for training and advanced education.

However, with the release of this budget, we are very concerned that the potential of inclusion and participation will not be achieved. We would argue that the details and overall direction of the budget do not support the aspirations of poverty prevention and elimination.




For example:

- People receiving support from AISH did not get an increase in their monthly amounts – which remain patently inadequate and ensures a sub-poverty level income. There was neither provision for an actual general increase nor a cost of living increase.
- Overall funding of income support for “learners” and people “expected to work” was cut significantly, and this will likely have a trickledown effect on the people themselves. The health dimensions of these programs also received a cut.
- The Alberta Seniors Benefit program will not be available for older people who have lived in this country for less than 10 years. One of the benefits of the welfare state was that it reduced the poverty level amongst seniors significantly due to policy support and program initiatives; however, this change is one of a number of examples – both federal and provincial – of directives that will serve to increase poverty rates amongst our senior population. This is also a troubling concept in terms of the application of social policy – people are residents, but they don’t qualify.
- FCSS funding remained constant – essentially a reduction. This could be an even greater loss if the community is expected to provide more services.
- There were some increases in funding to both homelessness and domestic violence but we are concerned that these will not be enough to meet the tremendous need.

As you are well aware, feedback from the many Albertans who contributed to the Social Policy Framework shows that Albertans want vibrant, inclusive communities and understand the need to support each other to ensure we all thrive. With appropriate taxation and revenue approaches, we know that Alberta can afford to make this investment. Together, we can work to eliminate poverty. But this requires significant action, involvement and financing from the provincial government. Therefore, we implore you to take immediate steps to turn back the budget decisions that unfairly target our province’s most vulnerable residents.

Please contact Lori Sigurdson at 780-421-1167 or lsigurdson@acsw.ab.ca if you have any questions. Thank you for your time and consideration of our concerns. We look forward to your response.

Yours truly,


for : Susan Brooke, Co-Chair ACSW Calgary Social Workers for Social Justice
Linda McFarlane, Co-Chair ACSW Calgary Social Workers for Social Justice