

# Speak. Share. Thrive.

SOCIAL POLICY FRAMEWORK

Working Paper  
*For Discussion*

# DEVELOPING A SOCIAL POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR ALBERTA



## INTRODUCTION

The Government of Alberta is leading the development of a Social Policy Framework that will guide the future of Alberta's social policy and programs. Premier Redford has made a commitment to end child poverty and reduce overall poverty, and that focus will be one of the primary goals of this Framework, but it is more than that. The Framework will describe how we create hope and opportunity for all Albertans by working together to improve social outcomes.

An important first step in creating the Framework is speaking with Albertans and hearing their ideas about the future of social policy in our province. This conversation will help all of us understand how everyone—from individuals, community and business groups, to participants from government, non-profit and voluntary sectors—can work in partnership to ensure that all Albertans, regardless of their circumstances, have the opportunity to participate fully in our economy, communities and cultural life.

This document is a working paper that is intended to start a conversation by outlining the potential vision, guiding principles and desired outcomes of the Framework. Its purpose is to provide readers with an overview of the necessity and purpose of a new Social Policy Framework in Alberta, as well as the principles and process behind its creation.

This paper, which is part of a larger engagement process where Albertans are encouraged to provide us with their thoughts and ideas on the future of Alberta's social policy, was created by:

- › looking at how parts of Canada and the world are approaching social policy;
- › talking to government staff who work in the planning and delivery of social services; and
- › listening to our partners in municipalities, the non-profit sector and business.

Our hope is that it will provide you with the information that you need to participate in the engagement process, which will run through the summer of 2012. Government will consider all of the input, ideas and thoughts that have been shared before finalizing the vision, principles and outcomes of the Framework. Then, in the fall of 2012, Government will again engage with Albertans to discuss your thoughts on the roles, responsibilities, and strategies needed to achieve our vision.

## WHAT IS A SOCIAL POLICY FRAMEWORK?

The Framework will describe the future direction of social policy in Alberta. Social policy determines the kind of society Albertans want for themselves, their families and their community. It is about how we meet human needs—needs like housing, employment, safety or child care. Social policy can be expressed in how we care for (and about) one another, and how individuals, communities and government come together to solve social issues.

By stating and communicating our beliefs and aspirations, we can all work together to achieve the same goals and use our talents, strengths and resources strategically, to help build stronger families and communities and ensure every child has the opportunity to be part of Alberta’s future.

When it is completed, the Framework will present:

- › **Forces of change** in our society, communities and families;
- › A clear **vision** for the future that informs the **results** to be achieved through social policy;
- › **Principles** to guide decision-making, actions and behaviour;
- › A description of:
  - a. the **roles and responsibilities** of everyone who is working towards achieving the Framework’s vision; and
  - b. the connections between **individuals and organizations** that are made possible by policy, programs and supports throughout Alberta.
- › **Measures or indicators** that are linked to the **results**; and
- › **Strategies** that enable the achievement of the results.



*“Social policy is about how we meet human needs—needs like housing, employment, safety or child care.”*



## WHY DO WE NEED A SOCIAL POLICY FRAMEWORK?

Social cohesion and the opportunity for all Albertans to be engaged members of our society matters to everyone. Perhaps we view our community with pride as the best place to live, work and raise a family, or perhaps we consider the question of how all Albertans fare from the view of human compassion. Maybe we weigh the societal cost of homelessness, poverty, and illiteracy on our health, education and justice systems. Whatever our concern, the fact is that social policy—and the cohesion and opportunities that it creates—is integral to how we describe and achieve the quality of life we want for ourselves, our families and our communities.

There are challenges to achieving that quality of life. Some conditions, such as low literacy, can affect an individual's overall well-being. When left unaddressed, these conditions can become magnified, such as when an individual's educational status affects their ability to earn an adequate income, which in turn can lead to health and social challenges for that person.

We want to build on our success by focusing our actions on persistent social challenges, including poverty, family violence, and the overrepresentation of certain groups—such as Aboriginal peoples—in our child protection and justice systems.

To do that, we require a new approach to social policy—one that coordinates the resources, investments, and actions of governments, communities, individuals and families. This means building on what we know has worked in the past, including:

- › Communicating a BIG goal (e.g. ending homelessness in 10 years or ensuring safe communities) to achieve a shared and tangible result;
- › Supporting individuals as a whole person, recognizing their strengths and their needs;
- › Addressing the root causes of disadvantage or vulnerability; and
- › Bringing all the parties to the table—families, neighbourhoods, businesses, non-profits and governments—to reflect that each group brings strengths, talents and resources that are needed to resolve our shared challenges.

## VISION FOR SOCIAL POLICY

Based on what we have heard so far, below is a draft vision for the future of social policy in Alberta to prompt your thinking and start the dialogue:

*Alberta will be one of the finest places in the world to live, work and raise a family because all Albertans have the opportunity to engage in our economic, social and cultural life.*



## OUTCOMES

The ultimate goal of the Framework is to have social policies, programs and systems that produce better results—or “outcomes”—by considering the needs of the whole person throughout his or her life. Outcomes indicate what we want to achieve for all Albertans.

Success in achieving the outcomes described in the Social Policy Framework will be measured using population-based measures and indicators (e.g. median income). These indicators and measures **will be determined once the outcomes of the Framework are identified.**

Based on the proposed vision, policy goals and feedback received to date, outcomes for Albertans that may appear in the Framework include:

- › Improved child well-being;
- › Better health;
- › Improved employment and income security;
- › Safer and more inclusive communities; and
- › Increased community and individual participation.



*Moving forward we want to enable change to achieve a bold vision for the future.*

## PRINCIPLES

Principles are criteria that guide the decisions, behaviour, and actions of the different partners involved with social policy. For example, the government may use these principles when designing programs or legislation, while a non-profit or voluntary group may use these principles to determine if their programs are aligned with the Social Policy Framework.

The Social Policy Framework will provide government with principles that assist with important decisions, such as determining the most effective ways to invest resources to address social challenges. We know, for instance, that the Framework will be one source of guidance during the upcoming Government of Alberta program reviews and results-based budgeting.

*“The Social Policy Framework will be ultimately successful if it results in positive social impact for Albertans and their communities.”*



Based on consultations to date, here are some of the possible principles of the Framework:

- › **Promoting dignity** is the cornerstone of our actions.
- › **Mutual responsibility** between the government and individuals. Government and community have important roles in creating an environment for success. Individuals are responsible for improving their life circumstances, achieving their own goals and realizing their full potential.
- › **Knowledge- and evidence-informed** policy and programs. We use knowledge or evidence gathered through a variety of means to inform the design and delivery of social supports.
- › **Cultural diversity** is acknowledged and respected during policy design and service delivery.
- › **Proactive and strength-based supports** that prevent social problems while strengthening families and communities.
- › **Investment in outcomes** so that resources achieve results.
- › **Transparency** about the actions taken and the results achieved.
- › **Collaboration** between governments, non-profits, community groups, citizens and clients is encouraged and maximized at every opportunity.

## MOVING FORWARD

While our current focus is to develop the right vision, principles and outcomes of the new Framework, any social policy framework is ultimately successful if it results in positive social outcomes for Albertans and their communities. Achieving those results will require strategies that can effectively address Albertans' needs.

To identify strategies for the Framework, we should consider how they will:

- › Address an issue that affects a large number of people, or an issue that significantly impacts a small number of people;
- › Succeed because of collaboration between individuals, governments and communities;
- › Affect more than one outcome in a positive manner; and
- › Address an issue that is important, both now and in the future.

We know that one of our core strategies will be creating a plan to eliminate child poverty and reduce overall poverty. Our engagement activities to date have highlighted others areas where action should be focussed. Some potential actions include:

- › Promoting the attainment of education and skills.
- › Improving employment opportunities and working conditions for all Albertans.
- › Focussing on early childhood development by improving access to early learning and child care opportunities.
- › Improving access to affordable housing.
- › Promoting concepts of social inclusion, belonging and engagement.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Our current focus is on developing the vision, outcomes and principles of the Social Policy Framework. Our goal is to create a framework that can adapt over time in response to the changing needs and desires of Albertans. Once we complete this phase of the engagement, we will reflect on the feedback and input shared and draft the Framework's vision, outcomes and principles. In the fall, we will engage on strategies, roles and responsibilities. The goal is to have a framework by late fall that government, community groups, non-profits and others can begin to use as we all move forward on achieving a shared vision and outcomes.



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