

# A Healthy Alberta Through Healthier Policies

Alberta's public health community is calling on Albertans to take the opportunity provided by the provincial election to discuss the issues that need to be addressed if we are to make Albertans healthier and our healthcare system sustainable.

## We Know That<sup>1</sup>:

✓ The health of the population is an important measure of — and an important contributor to — the overall well-being of society.

✓ Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being. It is not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

✓ Those with lower levels of income and education, or otherwise marginalized, do not enjoy the same good health as the rest of Alberta's population.

✓ The health of the population is determined by many factors, including:

- Environmental, social, economic and cultural conditions of our society and communities
- Physical and social conditions that people experience daily in the places where they live, learn, work and play
- Availability, accessibility and quality of health care, social, educational and other services
- Personal characteristics and biological factors such as sex, age and genetic legacy

## What is public health?

The science and art of promoting health, preventing disease and prolonging life through the organized efforts of society. Public health is not just doctors and nurses, hospitals and clinics. It's also schools and the environment, parks and poverty, social inclusion and marginalization.

Most of these factors lie beyond the reach of the health system and actions to change them require a wide effort from both within and outside governments. As such, we call on all parties to consider, explore and address the following:

1. Immunization ✓
2. Household food insecurity ✓
3. Universal, affordable child care ✓
4. Supervised consumption sites ✓
5. Inter-sectoral collaboration for health ✓

<sup>1</sup>These points were drawn from the 2009 [Declaration on Prevention and Promotion](#) signed by Canada's Ministers of Health.

# 1. Boost immunization in Alberta

## THE ISSUE

The World Health Organization declared vaccine hesitancy (the delay in accepting or refusal of recommended vaccines) one of the top 10 threats to global health in 2019.

Currently, vaccine uptake in Alberta is not adequate to protect all populations from preventable diseases.

Vaccine hesitancy is a major factor, even in Alberta, where these vaccines are available free of charge.

These diseases can cause serious illness, especially in infants and those with weak immune systems.

## WHY IT MATTERS

An immunization rate of 95% is required to protect populations during a measles outbreak, but only 79.21% of seven-year-olds had received the recommended two doses in 2017.

Fewer than 80% of two-year-olds in Alberta have received the recommended doses of pertussis-containing vaccine, making pertussis an ongoing concern.

Vaccines save the healthcare system money by preventing disease. For example, the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine in children saves \$16 for every dollar spent, and the influenza vaccine in adults 65 years and older saves \$45 in healthcare spending for every dollar spent.

## WHAT CAN ALBERTA DO?

- ✓ Require parents of un-immunized or under-immunized children to attend immunization information sessions with a qualified healthcare provider to learn the facts and make informed and documented choices about immunization.
- ✓ Include education on vaccine-preventable diseases and the benefits of vaccines in Alberta school curriculum.
- ✓ Develop a detailed plan to address low immunization rates, including the provision of resources for healthcare providers to respond to vaccine hesitancy and additional resources to increase the number/hours of public health clinics that administer vaccines.

### Resources:

- [Canadian Pediatric Society. Caring for kids - Immunization. Information for parents from Canada's pediatricians](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada. Canadian Immunization Guide](#)

## 2. Household food insecurity

### THE ISSUE

Household food insecurity – a lack of money to buy enough food – is a serious public health issue in Alberta.

More than one in 10 Alberta households experience food insecurity, which contributes to poor health.

At its root, household food insecurity is an income-related issue that can be addressed by ensuring all Albertans have enough money to meet their basic needs. Government-led strategies have the potential to ensure all Alberta households have sufficient income to afford food and other basic needs.

### WHY IT MATTERS

Public policies that lead to reductions in household food insecurity have the potential to result in health improvements and reduced healthcare costs.

A 2015 study found that annual healthcare costs were 16% higher in households with marginal food insecurity, 32% higher in households with moderate food insecurity, and 76% higher in households with severe food insecurity, when compared with food secure households.

### WHAT CAN ALBERTA DO?

- ✓ Consider a basic income guarantee to reduce household food insecurity and poverty.
- ✓ Increase social benefit rates (e.g. income supports, seniors benefits and AISH), and ensure rates are indexed to inflation.
- ✓ Ensure the minimum wage is adequate for household food security. Maintain the current minimum wage level and explore phased increases in minimum wage rates over time.
- ✓ Reduce provincial tax rates for low-income households.

#### Resources:

- [The Alberta Policy Coalition for Chronic Disease Prevention \(APCCP\): Public Policy to Address Household Food Insecurity](#)
- [PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research. Public Policy and Food Insecurity](#)

# 3. Universal, affordable child care

## THE ISSUE

Early childhood – the first five years – is a formative time that can impact the course of a person’s life.

Evidence suggest that safe, reliable and supportive relationships and environments have direct benefits to growth and development.

High-quality education and care can support young children and their families in balancing the demands of work outside of the home. However, in Alberta, access to high-quality early learning and care is limited or too expensive for many families.

## WHY IT MATTERS

Despite recent increases in provincial funding, Alberta’s demand for high-quality early learning and care continues to grow, and access is variable and inadequate.

The high cost of early learning and care and prohibitive subsidy requirements can burden many families in Alberta, particularly during economic downturns.

This may also place many families at an economic disadvantage, which has been proven to lead to poorer health, lower academic achievements and greater use of social services in the long run.

## WHAT CAN ALBERTA DO?

- ✓ Follow the example of other G7 jurisdictions and provide universal, affordable child care.
- ✓ Develop opportunities for the Alberta government to partner with service providers and universities, to formally evaluate current programs and apply best practices to optimize access, effectiveness and overall societal impact.

### Resources:

- [The Muttart Foundation. Municipal Child Care in Alberta: An Alternative Approach to the Funding and Delivery of Early Learning and Care for Children and their Families.](#)
- [The First 2000 Days Network. Early Childhood Development Network: An integrated approach to early childhood development.](#)
- [Government of Alberta Child Care Subsidy portal](#)

# 4. Supervised consumption sites

## THE ISSUE

The opioid crisis has claimed hundreds of lives in Alberta and continues to be a major public health issue.

Supervised consumption sites are an evidence-based intervention that have been shown to reduce deaths and connect people with care and valuable supports.

## WHY IT MATTERS

In addition to claiming a needlessly high number of lives, this crisis is taking a toll on the health care system, social services, and frontline workers.

Many overdoses can be managed at a supervised consumption site, reducing the need for ambulances.

## WHAT CAN ALBERTA DO?

- ✓ Continue to establish supervised consumption sites across the province.
- ✓ Engage communities around supervised consumption sites to address concerns.
- ✓ Continue to communicate with the public about the benefits of supervised consumption sites.

### Resources:

- [British Columbia Centre on Substance Abuse \(BCCSU\). Supervised Consumption Services: Operational Guidance. Vancouver: B.C. Ministry of Health, 2017.](#)
- [Government of Canada. Supervised consumption sites explained.](#)

# 5. Inter-sectoral collaboration for health

## THE ISSUE

The decisions that shape our health aren't made in our healthcare system alone. The decisions that shape our social and economic realities are, in fact, the ones that shape our health.

Unfortunately, decisions — about education, social services, taxes, transit availability and design, green spaces, restaurant licensing, legal frameworks and more — are often made in silos and rarely take into consideration the effects they will have on the health of Albertans.

## WHY IT MATTERS

If we are to ease the burden on our healthcare system and lessen the cost of treating a population ravaged by chronic diseases, including hypertension, cancer and depression, we need to find ways to make it easier for different sectors (e.g., government, non-profit organizations, private companies), and different departments within government, to work together to promote health.

## WHAT CAN ALBERTA DO?

- ✓ Explore and implement social and economic policies that improve well-being for all Albertans, rather than focus solely on economic markers.
- ✓ Support a 'health-in-all-policies' approach, whereby the health impacts of decisions in all government ministries are considered.
- ✓ Enable and encourage interdisciplinary groups to tackle societal problems, such as poverty, access to education, marginalization, vaccination hesitation, mental health and addiction.
- ✓ Encourage and enable impartial and scientific evaluation of inter-sectoral programs and policies, to determine effectiveness, affordability and societal impact.

### Resources:

- [Canadian Public Health Association \(CPHA\). Public health: a conceptual framework. 2017.](#)
- [Dutton DJ, Forest P-G, Kneebone RD, Zwicker JD. Effect of provincial spending on social services and health care on health outcomes in Canada: an observational longitudinal study. CMAJ 2018.](#)
- [Kershaw P. The need for health in all policies in Canada. CMAJ 2018.](#)

# Questions for Albertans to ask candidates

Public Health Matters

- If elected, what does your party plan to do in order to increase vaccination rates in Alberta?
- Does your party support a plan to address low vaccination rates and spiking vaccination hesitancy, including putting more public dollars toward vaccine resources for healthcare providers?
- How will your party address household food insecurity in Alberta?
- Would your party support a plan to implement a basic income guarantee approach for reducing household food insecurity rates and poverty?
- What is your party's plan to address limited access to affordable child care?
- Would your party follow other G7 jurisdictions to provide universal, affordable child care?
- Do you Support the expansion of the Flat Rate Child Care program to include all who need it?
- What would your party do to address the overdose epidemic?
- Would your party support continued efforts to establish supervised consumption sites in Alberta?
- Beyond providing funding the healthcare system adequately, how does your party propose we make Albertans healthier?
- What could be done now, that isn't being done, to improve Albertans' well-being?

Election Day is April 16. To find out more information related to the electoral process, where and how to vote, and the parties and candidates, visit [www.elections.ab.ca](http://www.elections.ab.ca)

## What is the APHA?

The Alberta Public Health Association is a provincial not-for-profit association that strengthens the impact of those who promote and protect the health of the public by speaking out for health, advocating on issues that affect health, and facilitating educational and networking opportunities.

[www.apha.ab.ca](http://www.apha.ab.ca)

This document is a collaboration of, and supported by, the following organizations:

