



IMPACTS2021

AN INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC RECOVERY FOR FAMILIES

COVID-19 magnified existing inequities

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted life for Edmonton families. Parents found themselves juggling job losses, working from home, and homeschooling, often without childcare. However, due to long standing, systemic inequities the impacts were experienced more by certain populations. Women, racialized people, immigrants, Indigenous peoples, young people and people with disabilities were the most impacted by job loss and COVID-19 morbidity and mortality. Creating an **inclusive economy** will be done, in part, by ensuring these families have less systemic stressors and more systemic support going forward.

Opportunity for creating equity

At the onset of the pandemic, progressive legislation and policies were required to ease the collective economic devastation. In 2020, the City of Edmonton mandated free transit, the Government of Alberta suspended evictions, and the federal government unveiled a monthly wage subsidy. Universal basic income is being seriously considered by the federal government and **accessible childcare** is understood to be key for economic recovery. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have yet to be fully realized and implementing equitable social policies will

be critical to changing the trajectory for a generation of children and families that were disproportionately harmed.

All families deserve economic recovery

As the pandemic continues to push certain individuals and families further into economic crisis, the social sector is working overtime to ensure that the economic recovery does not leave them behind. Yet, the sector has been challenged with the compounding effects of the 2015 economic downturn and increased demand for social services as a result of the pandemic. A robust social sector is an integral part of society and a lifeline for families. The Community-University Partnership (CUP) continues to work closely with social sector partners, supporting their research and evaluation needs to make evidence informed



decisions for those served. This issue of IMPACTS will highlight partnerships which strive to ensure families have economic support, access to affordable childcare, and **mental health support**.

Family and child rights

An equitable recovery for families and children requires not just one sector but the entire system to act transformatively. Competing institutional agendas can complicate and stunt progress. Regardless of the jurisdiction, children, youth, and families need to be centered and supported through collaboration and innovation by academia, government, business and the social sector.

COVID-19 intensified struggles for families

- 80% of families in Alberta reported difficulty managing homeschooling, working from home and other activities (All Our Families Study, 2020).
- 58% of families in Alberta had reduced income because of job loss or reduced hours (All Our Families Study, 2020).
- A 12% increase of police-reported incidents of domestic violence in Edmonton compared to 2019 (Edmonton Police Service, 2020).
- 11.8% unemployment in Edmonton, the highest in the province (Statistics Canada, 2020).

Family Recovery

EndPovertyEdmonton GAME CHANGERS

In 2016 EndPovertyEdmonton (EPE) identified six game changers essential to eliminating poverty. CUP supports the liveable incomes and affordable & quality childcare game changers.

- Access to mental health services
- Affordable housing
- Affordable & Quality childcare
- Accessible & Affordable transit
- Eliminating racism
- Liveable incomes



Inclusive economies

From 2005-2012, CUP's Families First Edmonton project collected baseline knowledge about low-income families and informed the development of EndPovertyEdmonton (EPE). CUP has been involved with EPE ever since and currently CUP's poverty research team is providing research and evaluation support for EPE's livable income game changer. The team's work is aimed at ensuring all Edmontonians have the financial means to achieve economic security and ensure meaningful participation in their communities.

CUP's collaborative approach to this work is rooted in an inclusive economic lens, focused on raising the standard of living and ensuring dignity for all families, especially the most marginalized. However, before policies to support families can be developed, we need to understand the economic characteristics of individuals and households and how they are surviving or thriving. Over the past year, CUP and EPE have explored Canada's "working poor," a group made invisible by the assumption

that work is always a pathway out of poverty. Structural barriers like race and gender discrimination in the labour market prevail across income and education levels, leaving these individuals stuck in cycles of precarity and insecurity. CUP researchers have analyzed Statistics Canada data about this population to identify barriers to obtaining support and economic recovery. These research results, highlighted in the blue box, can be used to inform local policies to create equity for working poor households.

Early learning and care

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of childcare in supporting parents and caregivers in the economy. Access to childcare not only provides the option to work but also facilitates pay equity for women, as women are the predominant caregivers who leave the workforce to raise children. The Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELC) was created by EPE to work on designing and supporting a system of integrated early learning and care. Over the past 2 years, CUP has supported ECELC to research and

document the status and trends of early learning and care in Edmonton.

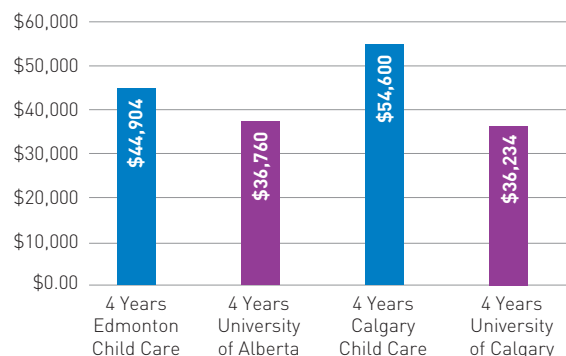
The issues of childcare in family recovery are complex. (1) The **high (and rising) costs** of childcare disproportionately affect low-income families by reducing access to high-quality early learning and care programs as well as employment opportunities for parents. A comparative tally of child care and university fees below highlights the staggering cost of early learning and care in Alberta. (2) The **childcare sector** faced numerous challenges in the pandemic such as forced temporary closures, temporary layoffs of early childhood educators, high family unemployment rates, and reduced family incomes. (3) The childcare sector struggles with rising operating expenses for programs and **low wages for the early childhood educator workforce**. The workforce, overwhelmingly women, makes an average of \$29,303 a year in Edmonton.

To learn more about the ECELC and about the state of early learning and care in Edmonton, visit their [website](#).

Who are Canada's working poor?

- Predominantly, the working poor are young, educated, and capable.
- Female-headed households are a higher proportion of the working poor.
- Immigrants are more likely to be in working poverty than their Canadian-born counterparts.
- Despite working more hours than the non low-income people, the mean disposable income for the working poor was significantly less.

CHILD CARE VS UNIVERSITY FEES 2019



Courtesy of Kathleen Flanagan

Youth Mental Health and Family Wellbeing

Youth mental health is vital to family wellness. Mental health issues often begin in young adulthood which can lead to long term loss of productivity if not mitigated. In Alberta, the long term mental health impacts of COVID-19 for underserved youth and their families have yet to be determined as do the repercussions to family wellbeing.

All in for Youth

All in for Youth uses an approach with demonstrated impact to respond to the needs of students in socially vulnerable schools. Supports, including meals, mental health counselling, and academic mentoring, are offered in a wraparound model which integrates and delivers these supports in five Edmonton schools. CUP researchers, serving as external evaluators, learned first-hand how the pandemic impacted these students, their families and their diverse needs. Initially, financial support and food was required. Next, the transition to on-line learning led to the need for laptops and internet access for some families. Pre-existing relationships between partner organizations and the collaborative wraparound model allowed staff and agencies to respond quickly to complex student and family needs in an personalized way.



In 2020, AIFY offered:

- 182 students and their families mental health supports
- 28 mental health group sessions
- 671 brokered connections to mental health supports to students and families

To support youth and their families, mental health therapists were certified in Telehealth to enable families to continue to access therapy supports. This connection into the family home is especially important for students at risk of domestic abuse. Students reported feeling isolated and therapists noticed a pandemic related increase in anxiety and stress for both parents and students. Though the mental health impacts from this pandemic will become more evident over time, All in for Youth mental health therapy continues to be a crucial support for these families and students during this pandemic.

Métis Settlement Life Skills Journey (MSLSJ)

CUP researchers have been working with seven of the eight Métis settlements in Alberta since 2009 to collaboratively develop and deliver life skills programs for youth 6-14 years. Through youth programming, participants build internal strengths in culturally appropriate ways. Play, art, carving, jigging, fiddling, and cooking facilitate learning about Métis identity, decision making, grief and loss, hopes and dreams, substance abuse, violence and bullying.

Since its inception, there has been a desire to develop a wraparound-like partnership, bringing together similar programs to work collectively and amplify benefits for youth and families. With the pandemic, the momentum slowed as programs moved to remote delivery. While the Life Skills program quickly moved to remote training for youth program facilitators and immediately shifted to delivering programs through at-home activity kits, other barriers to youth mental health were becoming apparent. Many youth,

transferred to online schooling, were dealing with poor internet connectivity (in some cases no connectivity) and lack of access to laptops. The accumulation of barriers to education and programming resulted in youth and families being further socially isolated, which increased concerns about mental health needs. Lack of research in the Settlements also presents challenges in measuring and responding to mental health trends; the lack of social sector support also means gaps in services for youth and family needs. However, despite rural isolation and slow government COVID-19 response, Métis Settlement families and community leaders have responded with grocery runs, continued supports for Elders/seniors, and other necessary actions to support community members.

Seeking an equitable economy and economic reconciliation for the Métis Settlements means offering more support to populations that have been traditionally under-resourced.



During the pandemic, MSLSJ contributed:

- 284 activity kits distributed to youth at home
- 43 online activities including jigging and cooking
- 10 online youth mentorship training activities
- In-person activities including carving, youth night, and wellness night
- Provision and distribution of personal protective equipment

Supporting the social sector

In 2019 and early 2020, Edmonton's social sector was adapting programming in response to provincial budget cuts as families and individuals sought to secure the support needed to maintain stability from the economic downturn. When the global pandemic was identified in March 2020, the economic landscape shifted again, resulting in more instability as community members lost jobs and the ability to meet their daily needs.

A year into the pandemic, the social sector is still struggling to continue daily operations while shifting in response to complex community needs, adhering to health restrictions, and supporting staff to work from home. The sector experienced temporary and permanent layoffs, closures, reduced revenue and limited resources. However, services were maintained by finding emergency funding, offering online or phone services, and reprioritizing programming. Alongside this evolution, the social sector is being pushed to take long-term transformative action so

it can adapt to reduced funding, complex community needs and adapting program and service delivery.

A healthy social sector is essential for a robust civil society and critical for families that require services due to structural barriers. As the long term impacts of the pandemic emerge, policies to support the social sector are needed to ensure its longevity during a crisis. As a starting point, Alberta social sector agencies self-identified stable core funding, funding for emergency related program modifications, flexibility in current funding agreements and operational support for virtual programming as important to delivering

their services over the next 12 months (Alberta Nonprofit Network, 2020).

CUP's research agenda is deeply intertwined with the needs of the social sector and CUP staff are prepared to support research and evaluation needs that will contribute to sector transformation. Collective action from all levels of government, business, funders and the private sector are required to ensure this sector remains viable. It is this type of collaboration, with all jurisdictions and sectors, that will create the opportunity to build new equity-focused structures that support the social sector and the children, youth and families they support.

“Addressing inequities is not the sole responsibility of the nonprofit sector, but it is an area where we hold considerable experience and expertise. All orders of government and the private sector look to us to lead on providing knowledge of first-hand experience, analysis of trends, and interpretation of the research on inequities.

Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations
- An Alberta Community Prosperity Strategy, 2021



For more information
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