

# WOMEN AND POVERTY IN CANADA:

*Where Does Edmonton Fit?*



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*This report was written by Margaux Robertson for the Edmonton Women's Initiative as part of a student intern placement program with the Institute of Public Administration Canada from April to June 2019. This paper is intended to provide an overview of the women in poverty in Canada, Alberta and Edmonton.*

# Introduction

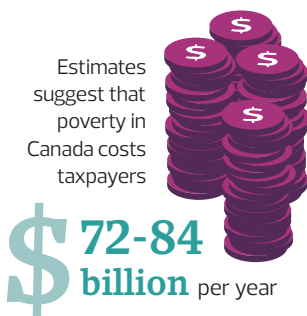
*Life in Canada is different for different genders and women are often expected to take on **roles and responsibilities based on outdated gender roles**. There have been significant advancements in women's rights, but **women continue to face challenges as a result of patriarchy**.*

Many of the institutions that impact life in Canada were created by men for men and are informed by a colonial perspective. Therefore the design of services and public spaces does not always take into account women's specific needs and perspectives (Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2018). Issues facing women are not simply "women's issues," they are also men's, and children's issues. We would all benefit from a more equitable Canada.

Canada has an international reputation for being welcoming, affluent, and multicultural, however, more than 1.9 million women in Canada are considered low income (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2018). Certain groups of women are more likely than others to fall into this category and there are many systemic barriers that stand in the way of their financial stability. This corresponds to the finding that more than half of Canadians (52%) believe poverty has been increasing where they live in recent years (Angus Reid Institute, 2018). Overall, one in every five women is poor in Canada (Canadian Women's Health Network, 2012).

Poverty is gendered, and women are more likely than men to live in poverty. Women are also most likely to head lone-parent households, which means that children are also adversely affected by gender inequity in Canada. Women in Canada make up about half of the population but on average have lower incomes, less housing security, more unpaid domestic labour, experience greater rates of poverty and gender-based violence, and in general have fewer opportunities than men. Improving women's equity and inclusion boosts the economy, increases productivity, and reduces child poverty. This is important considering poverty is expensive. Estimates suggest that poverty in Canada costs taxpayers \$72-84 billion per year (Canada Without Poverty, 2019).

Income affects every aspect of our lives, from what we eat to where we live, to what we wear and how we get around. Lack of income means doing things in a less efficient, safe, or cost effective way: like hauling laundry and groceries on the bus, using pay phones, not being dressed appropriately for the weather, and having to make tough choices about where to live (Canadian Women's Health Network, 2012). Poverty is powerful, and it permeates every aspect of life; financial anxiety, poor diet can impact physical and mental health, and a lack of funds can exacerbate loneliness and isolation. In 2019, there continues to be systemic discrimination throughout Canada, with increasing inequities in resources, access, and power.



# Background and Context

## Waves in the Feminist Movement



### First Wave early 1800s

Focusing on women's suffrage.



### Second Wave 1960s

Addressing exclusion and inequality.



### Third Wave 1990s

Encouraging individualism and intersectionality.



### Fourth Wave 2012

Social media and #MeToo.

1800s

## WOMEN'S HISTORY IN CANADA

Feminism is the the advocacy of women's political, cultural, and economic rights on the basis of the equality between men and women (Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2018). Feminist or Women's Movements have deep historical roots in Canada. Activists have campaigned for issues such as women's legal rights; voting, body autonomy; abortion and reproductive rights; including contraception and prenatal care; protection from domestic violence, and sexual harassment; workplace rights, including maternity leave and equal pay; and against all forms of discrimination women encounter.

In all, there have been three major waves in the feminist movement. The first wave of feminism– the suffragist period– emerged in the early 1800s. Their mandate focused on women's suffrage, or right to vote, and brought gains in rights and political power. While this work gained white women the right to vote in 1918, it wasn't until 1960 that all people in Canada could vote, including Indigenous, Black, and Asian Women (Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2018).

The second wave of feminism, also known as the protesters' period, began in the 1960s and furthered women's equality to include the workplace, reproductive rights, sexuality, and the family (Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2018). The movement aimed at addressing persistent exclusion and inequality, which was reaffirmed in the 1951 Fair Employment Practices Act and later the 1986 Employment Equity Act (Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2018).

The third wave of feminism first emerged in the 1990s and lasted until about 2012. Third wave feminists pushed to increase women's perspectives on politics and everyday life, and encouraged individualism and intersectionality. Third wave feminism focused on how race, ethnicity, class, religion, gender, and nationality are all significant factors when discussing feminism. Despite the many waves of change brought on by the feminist movements, women of colour, Indigenous people, and LGBTQ2S+ voices are often still marginalized and excluded from feminist agendas (Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2018).

The fourth wave of feminism began in about 2012, and is still centered around intersectionality and sexual harassment. Fourth wave takes advantage of the internet and social media as a platform for calling out inequities and misogyny, like justice against sexual assault and harassment, equal pay for equal work, and bodily autonomy like reproductive and abortion rights. Social media is the birthplace of fourth wave feminism and the #MeToo movement, where Twitter and Facebook became the battlegrounds between feminists and others. Advocates argue that the #MeToo movement created a 'call-out' culture in which sexism and misogyny can be challenged (Philips and Cree, 2014, p. 939). Feminism fits within the broader social agenda, as gender equity is recognized by academics as a key factor in alleviating poverty, improving women's health and achieving economic growth (Philips and Cree, 2014, p. 939–940).

1960s

1990s

2012

## HISTORY OF POVERTY REDUCTION IN CANADA

The way poverty was dealt with in Canada has shifted dramatically from a charity model and approach towards a human rights approach. This shift has emerged from concerns that programmatic interventions for many years have not lifted people out of poverty and the realization that poverty is rooted in deep systemic factors in society and institutions. A human rights approach tackles poverty from its root causes – societal conditions that create inequities manifested in poverty. A human rights approach puts people at the centre with a focus on their basic right to food, shelter and employment – the essential necessities to live a decent life.

*The government now plays a key role in working with communities to help alleviate poverty. Today, the United Nations' 17 **Sustainable Development Goals** highlight the importance of “leaving no one behind.” Goal number 1 of the sustainable development goals to transform our world is “**No Poverty**,” while other goals include zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, gender equality, reduced inequality, decent work and economic growth (United Nations, 2016).*

National measures of poverty in Canada date to the 1960s, when poverty became a public issue (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2015). Concerns for poverty alleviation grew from the appalling living conditions under which many of Canada's Indigenous people and elderly lived, and also by large regional income disparities. This sudden “discovery” of poverty contradicted the vision of affluence that prevailed in the postwar era. In 1964, the United States launched its “war against poverty” and Canada began a more quiet campaign of study and legislation in an effort to understand the causes and remedies (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2015).

In 1965, the federal government established a group of specialists to study and encourage greater federal-provincial collaboration in alleviating poverty. In 1968, Statistics Canada employed its first ever poverty measures in Canada. This report shocked Canadians as the 1971 report stated that 27% of Canadians lived in poverty (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2015). Many positive policies were created as a result of this shift towards a more human rights approach to poverty.

The Canada Pension Plan, the Guaranteed Income Supplement Program, and the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) were all introduced to help address poverty in Canada. The Canada Assistance Plan (1966) was a cost-share program between the federal and provincial governments that assisted individuals living with a disability, unemployed, or low income. CAP assisted many Canadians in poverty with day care, family counselling, and child welfare services. However, since 1995, CAP was replaced by the Canada Health and Social Transfer, which merged federal and provincial funding payments for social assistance. Provinces now have a greater discretion over social program spending, including those programs intended to alleviate or prevent poverty (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2015).

# Poverty Defined

Canada now uses the Market Basket Measure (MBM), that defines low income based on a specific set of goods and services that represent a basic standard of living. (Government of Canada, 2015). For example, a family is considered low income if it does not have enough money to buy specific goods and services in its community. It is an absolute measure of low income. This indicator is available for 49 different communities across Canada and is more sensitive to differences in the cost of living. This is an important step in poverty work because looking at income levels only paints a partial picture of poverty in Canada. To fully understand how poverty affects Canadians, there needs to be an understanding of the other factors that affect the everyday lives of those who live in poverty, such as housing, food, health and crime (Government of Canada, 2015).

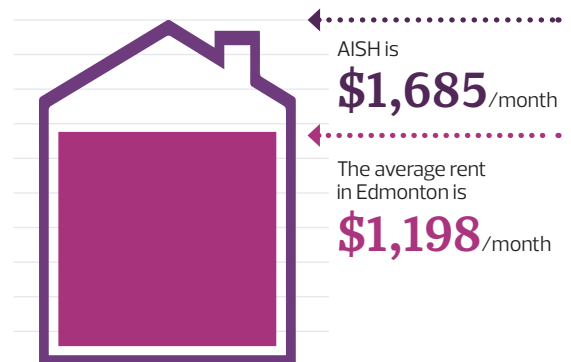
Canada does not have an official definition of poverty, but the working definition sees people living in poverty as individuals who are facing ongoing difficulty to cover expenses for basics like food, rent, utilities, winter clothing, school supplies, and dental care. Individuals living in poverty may rely on social assistance, "payday loans," shelters, and food banks. For individuals accessing social assistance, the definition of poverty is very well defined. There are three different income measures used to measure poverty, however, all of these measures have their limitations and do not provide a complete picture of poverty (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2018). There have been many calls for Canada to establish one clear poverty line definition. EndPovertyEdmonton states "people experience poverty when they lack , or are denied, economic, social and cultural resources to have a quality of life that sustains and facilitates full and meaningful participation in the community," which goes beyond the hard line definition of poverty in terms of income (EPE, n.d.). Many of the statistics available about women and poverty are based on Low Income Measures After Tax (LICO). However, according to an Angus Reid Institute survey on personal experiences of poverty in Canada conducted in 2018, many Canadians living above Statistics Canada's LICO are still 'struggling' and 22% of them have household incomes between \$50,000- \$100,000.

Some of people living in poverty may rely on social assistance. People who rely on social assistance live in poverty. Social assistance meets the bare minimum requirements, and often people are forced to choose between basic necessities like paying rent or buying groceries. For example, AISH in Alberta is \$1,685 per month, whereas the average rent per month in Edmonton is \$1,198, which does not leave much leeway for paying the electricity bill or buying groceries.

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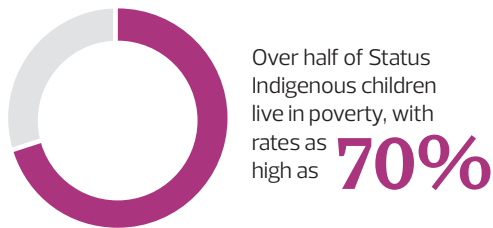
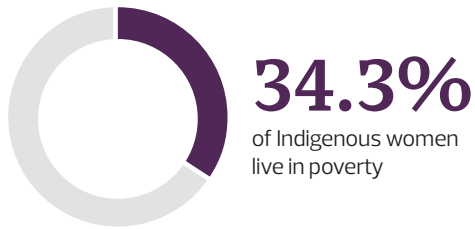
Poverty can be described as absolute or relative. **Absolute poverty describes deprivation**, a situation where a person can't afford basic needs such as adequate food, shelter, clothing, and transportation (Canadian Women's Foundation, p.3, 2018). **Relative poverty describes inequality**, a situation where a person is noticeably worse off than most people in their community.

Many low-income families can barely afford to pay for rent and put food on the table, let alone pay for dental care, eyeglasses, school outings, sports equipment for the kids, internet access, or prescription drugs. These are things that most people in Canada take for granted and would consider necessities.

People can fall into poverty for many different reasons; they may not have the necessary skills or education to get a job that pays enough to live above the poverty line, their community may have limited employment opportunities, some may have lost their job, others may have a physical or mental disability or illness that impacts their ability to find and maintain employment, they may have been in an accident or may be too ill to work, they may be experiencing workplace discrimination, or they may not be able to work due to rising childcare costs. Newcomers experience more difficulty finding work due to culture, language barriers and difficulties in having out of country work experience and education recognized. Given that poverty is also gendered, women are much more likely than men to experience all its effects.



# Equity and Equality



In Canada, income inequality is on the rise. For example, since 1999, for every dollar of wealth generated, 66 cents has gone to the wealthiest 20% of families. (Canadian Women's Foundation, p.3, 2018). In order for Canada to represent itself as a country that supports equality, poverty is a major barrier it must overcome.

Even in 2019, women still do the majority of unpaid domestic labour. Although the women's movements have improved conditions for women to work outside the home, women today now feel the squeeze of working double duty, both inside and outside the home. About 70% of women in dual-parent families with a child under the age of five also work outside the home. Heavy household workloads often force women to choose part-time, casual and seasonal work to balance childcare and home duties. Taking lower paying jobs, balancing childcare, and systemic barriers are a major cause of women and children living in poverty. In 2015, women spent an average of 3.6 hours per day doing unpaid household work, which is 50% more than the 2.4 hours that men spend doing the same tasks. Women are more likely than men to sacrifice career opportunities and advancement for better work-life balance in order to juggle their domestic responsibilities (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2018).

Racialized groups and recent immigrants are also more likely to be living in poverty, have low paying jobs, and be unemployed compared to non-racialized Canadians. Poverty is, therefore, also a problem of equality. (Canada Without Poverty, 2019). Different groups of women have higher rates of poverty than others. For example, according to Statistics Canada, Indigenous women (34.3%) face the highest rates of poverty throughout Canada, followed closely by immigrant women (31.4%) (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2018). Over half of Status Indigenous children live in poverty, with rates as high as 70% in the prairies. Children in women lone-parent families face poverty rates as high as 42% (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2013, 2018).



# Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American civil rights advocate and a leading scholar of critical race theory coined the term "intersectionality," also referred to as intersectional feminism. Intersectionality explores how gender intersects with other social categorizations like race, class, religion, sexual orientation, and disability and how they relate to systems and structures of oppression, domination, or discrimination.

Gender Based Analysis Plus or GBA+ is a process for examining how various intersecting identity factors impact the effectiveness of government initiatives. GBA+ is an analytical tool that is applied with the intention of advancing gender equality (City of Edmonton, 2017). The plus aspect of GBA+ highlights the intersectionality of gender equality. For example, age, education, race, language, geography, sexual and gender orientation, culture, and income. GBA+ was developed by the Government of Canada for employee training purposes, and has expanded to the Government of Alberta and the City of Edmonton (City of Edmonton, 2017). GBA+ is used as an assessment tool to consider potential impacts of policies, programs, or initiatives on diverse groups of citizens that considers gender and other intersectional factors (City of Edmonton, 2017). Additionally, the Gender Based Analysis plus is effective because it builds a person's capacity to challenge their assumptions about an opportunity, issue or group.

By using a GBA+ lens all levels of government are able to better serve citizens from all backgrounds. It also creates more equitable policies and programs that are designed to better suit the needs of diverse Canadians. GBA+ is essential in making important decisions on programs and services. For example, using a GBA+ lens, policy makers can create shelters that are accessible to women with disabilities, or create culturally sensitive support for Newcomers or Indigenous women. Looking at intersections of discrimination allows all levels of government to make better informed and just decisions.

*The City of Edmonton developed a video to introduce the concept of GBA+. Watch the video online here:*

*[bit.ly/2NzruLt](https://bit.ly/2NzruLt)*



# Cross-sections of Poverty

## WOMEN AND POVERTY IN CANADA

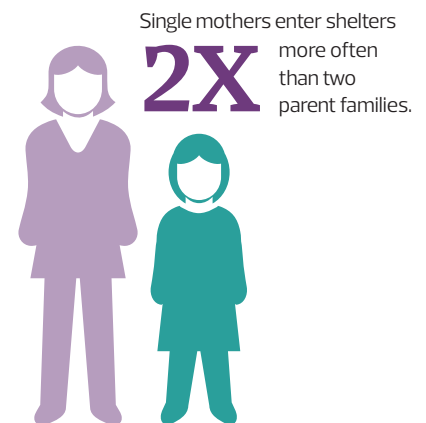
Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made international headlines shortly after his swearing-in as Canada's new Prime Minister. He did not waste time announcing his cabinet, which was comprised of half women and half men. His reason for creating gender parity in cabinet – “because it's 2015.” Despite Canada's global praise for being equitable, accepting and just, there is still work to do to ensure that all Canadians have access to safe housing, healthy food, clean drinking water, affordable childcare, health-care, and reliable employment.

*In Canada, communities are experiencing **growing inequities in resources, access, and power.** Indigenous peoples, women, racialized people, people with disabilities, people living in poverty, youth, seniors, newcomers, and LGBTQ2S+ communities continue to **face barriers when accessing health, employment, and housing.***

More than 235,000 Canadians experience homelessness annually, costing the economy over \$7 billion. On any given night in Canada, more than 35,000 are homeless. Single mothers enter shelters twice as often as two parent families. Domestic violence is a contributing factor to homelessness and when women and children are homeless, they are at an increased risk of violence, sexual assault and exploitation (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2018).

People with lower incomes tend to have shorter lives and more health problems (Canadian Women's Health Network, 2012). Canada is the only industrialized country with a universal healthcare system but not a national pharmacare policy (Canada without Poverty, 2019). Additionally, one in eight Canadians struggle to put food on the table. Food bank use is steadily increasing in Canada, 28% higher than in 2008 (Canada without Poverty, 2019). Food-insecure households were 80% more likely to report having diabetes, 60% more likely to report high blood pressure and 70% more likely to report food allergies. (Canada without Poverty, 2019). Poor health outcomes are just one aspect of poverty that is in dire need of attention by all levels of government.

In 2015, Canada implemented its First Poverty Reduction Strategy, Opportunity for All. This strategy brings together new investments of \$22 billion that the Government of Canada has made to support the social and economic well-being of all Canadians (Social Development Canada, 2018). The federal government has also made long-term investments in areas such as housing, clean water, health, transportation, early learning and child care, and skills and employment, which will help address the multiple dimensions of poverty (Social Development Canada, 2018). The Government has developed Opportunity for All using a GBA+ lens in order to take into consideration the variation in experiences and barriers that different groups face related to poverty.



The Government of Canada has promised to work closely with provinces, territories and municipalities to forge strong bonds with Indigenous peoples, stakeholders, charities and community groups on the front lines of tackling poverty in communities across Canada to ensure our programs and policies are aligned and complementary, as Canadians expect and deserve nothing less (Social Development Canada, 2018). On May 23, 2019, The Government of Canada's Department for Women and Gender Equity announced that they will be investing \$4.05 million in 11 women's organizations and Indigenous organizations serving women in Edmonton and Northern Alberta. This funding will help organizations tackle systemic barriers impeding women's progress while recognizing and addressing the diverse experiences of gender and inequality across the country. This is a promising announcement that will likely have positive impacts on women and children living in poverty in Edmonton.

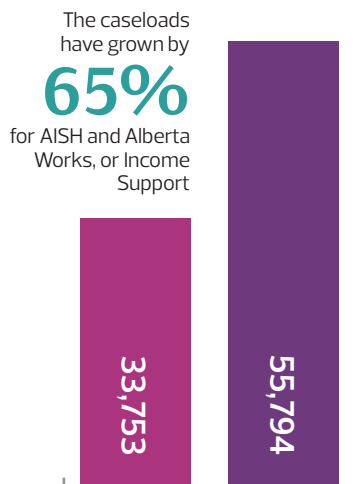
## WOMEN AND POVERTY IN ALBERTA

Alberta is one of two provinces that does not have a provincial poverty reduction strategy (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2018), however, Calgary and Edmonton are paving the way for other cities in their "Enough for All" and EndPoverty Edmonton initiatives. Despite the lack of a provincial plan, Statistics Canada released the results of the Canadian Income Survey and announced that Alberta's child poverty rate was cut in half between 2015 and 2017. This means that 44,000 fewer children are living in poverty (Tamarack Institute, 2019). Alberta still has the largest gap between the rich and the poor of all the Canadian Provinces, and poverty costs Albertans about \$7.1 to \$9.5 billion per year (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2018). There have been many waves in reducing child poverty largely because of improved child tax benefits, which gives parents more financial support while raising their young children. These child benefits from both the federal and provincial governments have helped lift many Albertan children out of poverty. However, the same benefits do not apply to those without children or without full time custody of their children.

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"Alberta still has the largest gap between the rich and the poor of all the Canadian Provinces, and poverty costs Albertans about \$7.1 to \$9.5 billion per year (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2018)."

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In Alberta, demand for income support has grown significantly in the last three years. The caseloads have grown by 65%, from 33,753 to 55,794, for AISH and Alberta Works, or Income Support (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2018). Alberta's Income Support rates among the lowest in Canada, despite a small increase in January 2019 (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2018). The increase in demand for social assistance is likely due to the economic downturn that hit Edmonton's labour market hard. In 2018, there were still 5,735 people experiencing homelessness based on an April 2018 homeless count, and the numbers are likely much higher (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2018). In October 2018, the Provincial NDP government increased the minimum wage from \$11.20 per hour (\$10.70 for liquor servers) to \$12.20 per hour for all workers, and again to \$15 per hour in October 2018. However, the newly elected UCP government has promised to reduce the minimum wage, which will undoubtedly have impacts on women and children living in poverty.

The NDP government made significant changes in reducing child and family poverty, however these programs and initiatives will likely change under the new leadership. Over the last four years, the Government of Alberta made many strides towards women's equity. Their work focused on Gender-Based Analysis (GBA+), violence prevention, encouraging women in leadership and elected office, and women's economic security (Government of Alberta, n.d.).

The annual cost of poverty in Alberta is \$7 billion. This works out to \$2,700 every year for each taxpayer (EndPovertyEdmonton, n.d.). The numbers are stark, yet investing in poverty elimination will reduce the costs of healthcare, police services, employment insurance, and will ultimately pay for itself while creating a more just and equitable society. In 2014, there were 35,210 lone-parent families in Edmonton and 30.6% of them lived in poverty (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2017). Lone-parent families in metro Edmonton received \$142.1 million in child tax benefits from the federal government. Child benefit increases reduce poverty. Non-taxable child benefits are the most effective way to reduce poverty as money is put directly into the pockets of low income families. Federal child tax benefits are important in Edmonton as they will help offset the decrease in employment income during uncertain economic times.

## WOMEN AND POVERTY IN EDMONTON

All three levels of government have seldom been aligned to make progress in poverty reduction, however, that has not stopped the City of Edmonton from tackling poverty in their city. Over the past three decades, income inequality in Edmonton has increased (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2017). Edmonton is one of the fastest growing cities in Canada, and much of its rapid growth is driven by its previously strong economy. Edmonton is currently experiencing an economic downturn caused by low oil and gas prices. Many

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Alberta has the **highest rate of working poverty in Canada** (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2017). Although there is employment, working poverty exists in Edmonton because **the pay is insufficient.**

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of the jobs in Edmonton are reliant on government and other public sector jobs. This recession has caused the unemployment rate in Edmonton to increase.

Edmonton is the youngest of Canada's six largest urban centres, with a median age of 36.0 years. Edmonton's younger population means more people in the labour force and fewer challenges with an aging population (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2017). Edmonton is increasingly diverse, according to Statistics Canada 2016, 38% were visible minorities and 6% identified

as "Aboriginal" (Statistics Canada, 2016). Despite the economic downturn, census results show that there are no signs that settlement is slowing down in Edmonton. The City of Edmonton has a disproportionately high rate of low income compared to the surrounding suburban communities.

There are 100,000+ Edmontonians currently living in poverty (EndPovertyEdmonton, n.d.). Many Edmontonians are considered 'working poor,' which means they are often employed full time, yet have insufficient income to be above the poverty line. Alberta has the highest rate of working poverty in Canada (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2017). For example,

in 2011, 59.2% of children living in poverty in Alberta lived in families where both parents worked full time for the entire year. Although there is employment, working poverty exists in Edmonton because the pay is insufficient. Low paying jobs are often precarious and lack job security, fixed hours of work, benefits such as dental, prescription drug plans and paid pensions. In 2016, 75% of jobs in Edmonton were in the services sector, like retail and wholesale trade, accommodations and food services, which pay predominantly low or minimum wages (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2017). About 18% of Edmontonians earn \$15/ hour or less. The majority of low-wage workers are women (62%). In Edmonton, women earn \$0.743 for every dollar that men make (Edmonton Community Foundation, 2018).



**62%** of low wage workers are women



Women earn **\$0.743** for every dollar that men make

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has released three (2015, 2016 and 2018) rankings of the best and worst cities for women in Canada. They look at 5 factors in the country's 25/26 largest cities. In 2015, Edmonton was ranked second last and again in 2019. In Edmonton, women rank well in health, but poor in leadership, safety, economic security, and education (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2019).

As part of the Women's Initiative mandate, the Edmonton Women's Quality of Life (EWQL) Scorecard was developed to provide a snapshot of Edmonton Women's lives in comparison to men in Edmonton and women throughout Canada. The scorecard summarizes the quality of life indicators for women in Edmonton, and helps to identify areas of progress, and those in need of attention (City of Edmonton, 2018). The scorecard provides insights into five areas that greatly affect women, including: finance and economy; leadership, political empowerment and participation; education; health and wellness; and safety (City of Edmonton, 2018). In 2017 and 2019, the Women's Initiative released the Edmonton Women's Quality of Life Scorecard. This scorecard looks at more factors than the 5 considered by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Similarly this City of Edmonton scorecard found that women face high rates of sexual and domestic violence, but are well educated and have good health outcomes.

*Most notably, the scorecard highlights that despite the economic slowdown since 2014 which has impacted employment rates throughout Alberta, **“women in Alberta are the highest paid in Canada”** (City of Edmonton, p.2, 2018).*

Safety concerns in Edmonton are on the rise, rates of reported sexual assault and intimate partner violence are both on the rise in Edmonton, and are substantially higher than than the national average (City of Edmonton, 2018). The city has developed new programs to address gender-based violence due to the increasing numbers of women, children and seniors seeking shelter, which is important considering "intimate partner violence still remains the greatest health risk to women around the world" (City of Edmonton, p.3, 2018). Domestic violence victims are more likely to be women between the ages of 20-34, are

mothers, and victimized by an intimate partner with whom they are living with (Edmonton Community Foundation, 2018). There has been a 13% spike in reported sexual assaults in Edmonton over 2016 (Edmonton Community Foundation, 2018). Edmonton has the second highest rate of sexual assault in Canada, and only Winnipeg has a higher rate among other major cities.(Edmonton Community Foundation, 2018). However, this can also be viewed positively. Edmonton Police Services noted that an increase in sexual assault reporting means people feel more comfortable coming forward after an assault.

# 9X

Indigenous people are nine times more likely to be homeless in Edmonton.

## INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND POVERTY

Edmonton is located at the geographic centre of Alberta's portion of Treaty 6 territory. According to the 2016 census, 50,280 or 5.5% of Edmontonians self identify as "Aboriginal"(Statistics Canada, 2016). Edmonton has the second largest urban Indigenous population after Winnipeg. The population of Indigenous women is the fastest growing population in Canada (Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2018). Canada's history of colonization and residential schools, in addition to the pervasive underfunding of Indigenous services on and off reserve, has left many Indigenous people and communities living in poverty. In Edmonton, 52% of surveyed homeless population identified as Indigenous (Edmonton Community Foundation, 2018). Indigenous people are nine times more likely to be homeless in Edmonton (City of Edmonton, 2018).

Not all young Edmontonians share equally in the prosperity of our growing city. In particular, young Indigenous Edmontonians experience significantly higher poverty rates than others (EndPovertyEdmonton, n.d.). The research is clear, more funding is needed to address the treatment of Indigenous people in Canada. Increased funding can have positive intergenerational impacts by reducing poverty for Indigenous women and families.

EndPovertyEdmonton recognises the dire need to address the systemic inequities that have been forced onto Canada's First Peoples. The first goal of the EndPovertyEdmonton Road Map is a recognition that eliminating poverty is a profound act of reconciliation with Indigenous Edmontonians. This is an important first step in attempting to address the high rates of poverty among Indigenous Edmontonians.



## NEWCOMER WOMEN AND POVERTY

Edmonton is an increasingly diverse city. In 2013, about 26% of Edmontonians were born outside of Canada, however, a growing number of newcomers are choosing to settle in Edmonton, and these numbers continue to climb annually (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2017).

The highest population of Newcomers in Edmonton are from the Philippines, India and China, in that order. According to Canadian Women's Foundation, 21% of visible minority women and girls and 32% of immigrant women (who immigrated to Canada between 2011 and May 10, 2016) live in poverty, however these numbers are likely much lower than reality. Additionally, Indigenous and Newcomer women often have larger families than CBNI Individuals and this impacts their likelihood of living in poverty. Newcomer women require culturally sensitive supports to assist them in reducing poverty.



**32%** of immigrant women in Canada live in **POVERTY**



**1 in 5** children live in poverty in Edmonton.

## CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND POVERTY

Children and youth are particularly vulnerable to the detrimental effects of poverty throughout their lifespan. Decades of research show that children and youth's health outcomes are impacted more greatly by poverty than their adult counterparts (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2018). For example, food insecurity is an issue in their household, poor nutrition or lack of food will impact development and negatively impact their school achievements. Poverty has negative physical, psycho-social, and academic effects on children and youth. This may include abuse, neglect, school drop out, behaviour and emotional regulation problems, mental and physical illness, and developmental delays, which further puts them at risk of continuing in a cycle of poverty (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2018).

In 2014, 34,220 (17.8%) children were low income in the City of Edmonton. Poverty rates are higher for larger families with three or more children (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2018). Over half of lone parent families with three or more children lived in poverty in Edmonton. Most low income families in Edmonton live far below the poverty line. Managing poverty costs us our future when our children are too hungry to learn (EndPovertyEdmonton, n.d.). In Edmonton 1 in 5 children live in poverty and 1 in 3 children are raised by a single parent. (Canada without Poverty, 2019). Additionally, the median cost of monthly preschooler fees is \$885 in Edmonton making it difficult for families to earn an adequate wage that will offset the costs of child care. (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2018). In 2017 the previous Alberta government launched quality, affordable, subsidized child care through a \$25/day daycare pilot project. The universal twenty five dollar a day childcare pilot created 7,300 spaces across the province.

# Current Edmonton Initiatives

The City has **two key Council Initiatives** that speak to the issue of poverty and gender to various degrees and in different ways. One is the **Women's Initiative** and the other is **EndPovertyEdmonton (EPE)**.



EndPovertyEdmonton is a community-led entity to fulfill a vision of ending poverty in the city within a generation. EPE believes that there are 6 game changers that could make a big difference in improving the lives of people struggling with poverty and create pathways for them to thrive and prosper. These game changers are also significant markers for improving the women's well being; eliminating racism, livable incomes, affordable housing, accessible and affordable transit, affordable and quality child care, and access to mental health services and addiction supports (EPE, n.d.).

Specific actions that the City of Edmonton is implementing as part of the EPE Road Map are affordable transit initiatives; RIDE Program which provides subsidized bus passes that also comes with a Leisure Access Pass and the Kids Ride Free Program where 12 years old and under ride free when accompanied by a fare-paying adult. These programs impact households, including women who are living in poverty.



The Edmonton Women's Initiative is a Council initiative that addresses gender equity, and coordinates the Women's Advocacy Voice of Edmonton (WAVE). WAVE was established in 2014 as an advisory board to City Council, and provides insights and advice on policy from a women's rights and issues perspective. WAVE ensures that women's views are presented fairly and equally from every background, including social, cultural, physical and occupational (Edmonton Community Foundation, 2018).

WAVE is made up of 15 community volunteers from diverse backgrounds and experiences. WAVE provides valuable insights and advice on policy and affairs relevant to municipal jurisdiction through a gender lens (City of Edmonton, 2019). This Council initiative aims to foster and promote leadership, equality, opportunity, access to services, justice and inclusion for women in Edmonton.



# Gaps and Conclusions

*Research and lived experience shows that **there is a lot of work to do in order to make Canada a place where all women have full and equal access to resources and opportunities** despite the fact that many Canadians believe that women are already equal (Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2018).*

- 1 WOMEN'S INCLUSION** is fundamental to a progressive and sustainable society. Closing the gender wage gap in Canada would be extremely profitable. Gender pay equity estimates \$105 billion dollar growth in GDP (gross domestic product), but would also improve the quality of life in every aspect, including family, health, economic, social and political (Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2018).
- 2 WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS** are essential to support women and girls in the community, yet are chronically underfunded, underestimated and undermined. Funding at all levels of government is essential in working towards equity. Improved intergovernmental collaboration and advocacy on poverty would help alleviate poverty in all aspects of Canadians' lives. Without proper collaboration, poverty elimination is impossible due to the interconnected nature of poverty. Alberta must create and implement a provincial poverty reduction strategy with clear targets and timelines, and work with the federal and municipal governments if they are truly committed to eliminating poverty.
- 3 HOUSING AND SHELTER** are in dire need of attention. Despite Canada's commitment to increase affordable housing, all levels of government must invest in a wide range of supportive housing such as; shelters, supportive transition housing, subsidized housing, housing with affordable childcare, and housing for seniors. Newcomer and Indigenous women accessing social support require culturally sensitive supports tailored to their unique needs. Women and children fleeing violence need proper counselling and safety supports to transition out of shelters safely.
- 4 CHILDCARE** is another important aspect of eliminating poverty and making Canada more equitable for all women. Canada lacks affordable childcare and equitable workplace policies like flex-time, work from home options, and caregiver leave. Investing in affordable or subsidized child care and early learning with a \$25/day cap is one place to start.
- 5 ENDING POVERTY** for women will directly benefit children and work towards ending the cycle. In turn, everyone benefits from a more equitable Canada. Policies that improve income equality, including those that support women's participation in the workforce, also improve the overall economy (Canadian Women's Foundation, p.3, 2018).

Although some of the statistics are disheartening, Edmonton is a world leader in women's equity and poverty reduction strategies. Edmonton's Women's Initiative is helping to ensure women's and girl's perspectives are being included in conversations that shape the city and it is among the first of its kind in Canada (City of Edmonton, 2019). The Women's Initiative is supporting the work of governments to continue to bring women's voices into decision-making. EndPovertyEdmonton is an innovative approach to poverty reduction strategies, and the work is being replicated in other municipalities.

The economic downturn has impacted Edmonton, yet this has not impeded on the progress towards a more equitable city.

# Definitions and Abbreviations

<b>Absolute Poverty</b>	“Absolute poverty describes deprivation, a situation where a person can’t afford basic needs such as adequate food, shelter, clothing, and transportation” (Canadian Women’s Foundation, 2018).
<b>After-Tax Low Income Measure</b>	AT LIM is the international standard used to measure poverty. Those with after tax income 50% below the national after-tax median income, adjusted for family size are considered to be living in low income. AT LIM is calculated after federal and provincial income taxes have been paid and income transfers received. In 2014, the low income threshold for a single person household was \$17, 824, \$30,301 for a lone-parent family with two children under age 16 (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2017).
<b>AISH</b>	Alberta income for the Severely Handicapped. AISH provides financial and health benefits to those who are permanently unable to work due to a health condition or disability (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2018, p. 10).
<b>Alberta Works</b>	Also known as Income Support in Alberta. Income support provides financial assistance to individuals and families in Alberta who do not have the resources to meet their basic needs (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2018, p.10).
<b>Ally</b>	A person who supports and individual or group to be treated equitably and fairly. This often grows out of self awareness of inequities or privileges we have experiences. Action is taking individually or collectively to create conditions that enable everyone to have equal access to resources and benefits. (City for All Women Initiative Ottawa, 2015, p. 17).
<b>CAP</b>	Canada Assistance Plan
<b>CBNI</b>	Canadian-born non-Indigenous
<b>CMA</b>	Edmonton Census Metropolitan Area
<b>EPE</b>	EndPovertyEdmonton
<b>EWQL</b>	Edmonton Women’s Quality of Life (EWQL) Scorecard
<b>Feminism</b>	The belief that women have been historically disadvantaged and this ought to change (Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2018, p. 6).

<b>GBA+</b>	Gender Based Analysis plus <a href="https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/initiatives_innovation/womens-initiatives.aspx">https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/initiatives_innovation/womens-initiatives.aspx</a>
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>Intersectionality</b>	The intersection, or crossover, of our many identities affects how each of us experiences our municipality. These intersections occur within a context of connected systems and structures of power (e.g., laws, policies, state governments, other political and economic unions, religious institutions, media) (City for All Women Initiative Ottawa, 2015, p. 18).
<b>Low-income</b>	Often used interchangeably with the term poverty. After tax income is often used as a measure.
<b>Low Income Measure</b>	The Low Income Measures (LIMs) are a set of thresholds estimated by Statistics Canada that identify Canadians whose incomes are below half of the median of the adjusted income distribution. The adjustment is made such that economies of scale in consumption within a household are accounted for.
<b>Low-wage workers</b>	Earn \$15/ hour or less.
<b>LICO</b>	Low income Cut off
<b>Market Basket Measure</b>	The Market Basket Measure (MBM) is a measure of low income based on the cost of a specific basket of goods and services representing a modest, basic standard of living.
<b>Motherhood Penalty</b>	In the workplace, working mothers encounter systematic disadvantages in pay, perceived competence, and benefits relative to childless women. Mothers may experience disadvantages in terms of hiring, pay, and daily job experience.
<b>Parity</b>	The state of being equal, especially regarding status and pay.
<b>Poverty</b>	People experience poverty when they lack , or are denied, economic, social and cultural resources to have a quality of life that sustains and facilitates full and meaningful participation in the community (EPE, n.d.).
<b>Precariously housed</b>	Living in affordable, below standards, and/or overcrowded housing conditions (Canada without Poverty, 2019).

<b>Privilege</b>	The experience of freedoms, rights, benefits, advantages, access and/or opportunities afforded to members of a dominant group in a society or in a given context (City for All Women Initiative Ottawa, 2015, p. 18).
<b>Relative Poverty</b>	“Relative poverty describes inequality, a situation where a person is noticeably worse off than most people in his or her community. Many low-income families can barely afford to pay for rent and put food on the table, let alone pay for dental care, eyeglasses, school outings, sports equipment for the kids, internet access, or prescription drugs. These are things that most people in Canada take for granted and would consider necessities” (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2018).
<b>Systemic Barriers</b>	Obstacles that exclude groups or communities of people from participation in, and the benefits of, social, economic, and political life. They may be hidden or unintentional, but are built into the way society works. Existing policies, practices and procedures, as well as assumptions and stereotypes, reinforce them (City for All Women Initiative Ottawa, 2015, p. 18).
<b>Women's Suffrage</b>	The right to vote.
<b>Working poverty</b>	Working often full time while earning an insufficient income to be above the poverty line. Alberta has the highest rate of working poverty in Canada (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2017).

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