

POLICY PAPER

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OUR
FUTURE
TOGETHER

CUPE ALBERTA
2016 CONVENTION
Edmonton, Alberta



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Economy

Alberta's economy is suffering. Crude prices continue to plunge. Job losses continue to mount. Alberta's economy needs stimulus to dull the pain in the short-term and diversification to stabilize and strengthen Alberta's economy in the long-term.

The federal and provincial governments have announced billions of dollars in infrastructure spending. Infrastructure investment will address Alberta's considerable infrastructure deficit, provide Albertans with jobs and stimulate the economy. Diversification options include growing Alberta's value added petrochemical sector and petro-alternative energy sector.

Action #1

CUPE Alberta will continue to lobby the Alberta government to continue to invest in public services and infrastructure even as government revenues decrease.

Action #2

CUPE Alberta will lobby the provincial government to diversify Alberta's economy.

Action #3

CUPE Alberta will advocate for the development of public petro-alternative energy technology, production, transmission and distribution, and the establishment of petro-alternative jobs, in Alberta.

Action #4

CUPE Alberta will advocate for increasing value added industry in Alberta such as upgrading and processing of raw energy resources, to get more jobs for every barrel of oil extracted.

Poverty and Homelessness

Alberta is rapidly shedding jobs, leaving more workers with fewer opportunities. As labour supply exceeds demand, it is exceedingly important to ensure that all Albertans are protected by collective agreements and progressive employment and health and safety standards.

Increasing living wage density will leave fewer Albertans working in poverty. Expanding universal healthcare will help struggling Albertan families to meet their basic health needs.

Municipalities have made some progress on housing the homeless. Still, more is needed as wait lists for social housing continue to grow. Investing in public social housing will provide jobs and low-cost housing for Albertans, while shrinking Alberta's annual poverty related costs.

Action #5

CUPE Alberta will work with CUPE Locals to encourage Alberta employers to become living wage employers.

Action #6

CUPE Alberta will advocate for the implementation of Alberta's 10 year plan to end homelessness.

Action #7

CUPE Alberta will lobby the provincial government to further increase the minimum wage and improve employment standards and enforcement mechanisms, including Alberta's *Employment Standards Code* and Occupational Health and Safety legislation. CUPE Alberta will also lobby the provincial government to amend the *Labour Relations Code* to make it easier to form a union and bargain a fair collective agreement.

Action #8

CUPE Alberta will advocate for the expansion of universal health care coverage.

Action #9

CUPE Alberta will work with CUPE Locals in supporting the development of school meal programs.

Action #10

CUPE Alberta will advocate for Housing First programs for those with addiction and mental health challenges.

Increasing CUPE's Bargaining Power

Alberta's ailing economy and high unemployment rate will create bargaining challenges in both the public and private sector. Changes to Alberta's Labour Code and increased organizing efforts are needed to counterbalance employer power.

Alberta government revenues have declined significantly. CUPE will need to remain vigilant to ensure that public sector collective agreements are honoured and CUPE members continue to make gains, whether monetary or non-monetary, even in these difficult times.

Action #11

CUPE Alberta will endorse CUPE National's strategy for organizing.

Action #12

CUPE Alberta will oppose efforts to break contracts with public sector workers.

Action #13

CUPE Alberta will continue to strengthen and build relationships with community partners.

Pensions

The Local Authorities Pension Plan (LAPP) benefits members, the province and the economy. Currently, the Minister of Finance is the sole legal trustee of the LAPP. Primary decision making power should rest with the parties who pay for and benefit from the plan and who are exposed to the risks of deficiencies. That is why CUPE supports joint governance of the LAPP.

Expanding the Canadian Pension Plan will bring greater retirement security to Albertans and benefit Alberta's economy. In order for CPP to be amended, the federal government along with 2/3 of the included provinces, making up 2/3 of the population, must agree to the amendments. The support and leadership of the Alberta government is crucial on this file.

Action #14

CUPE Alberta will continue to lobby the Alberta government to make the changes necessary to establish joint governance of LAPP.

Action #15

CUPE Alberta will continue to support the expansion of the CPP and work with the Canadian Labour Congress, the Alberta Federation of Labour and other unions to double the CPP.

Action #16

CUPE Alberta will lobby the Alberta government to support the expansion of the CPP.

Action #17

CUPE Alberta will lobby the federal government to support the expansion of the CPP.

Mental Health at Work

One in five Canadians will suffer from mental illness in their lifetime. Suicides are up by a third in Alberta and suicide is the number one cause of death for First Nations under the age of 44.

Alberta needs to improve and expand the services available for those Albertans suffering from mental illness and addiction. However, even the best services are only a benefit to those who seek them out and stigma prevents an estimated two thirds of individuals experiencing mental illness from seeking help. Significant efforts must be made to eliminate the stigma associated with mental illness.

Significant efforts must also be made to prevent mental illness where possible. Seventy-five percent of mental health issues begin during childhood or adolescence and mental and emotional well-being are

affected by very early life experiences. Working conditions also have a profound impact on mental health and well-being. As many as a quarter of Canadian workplaces are mentally injurious.

Action #18

CUPE Alberta will lobby employers to adopt the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace.

Action #19

CUPE Alberta will support member driven campaigns to increase mental health awareness and decrease stigmas around mental health.

Action #20

CUPE Alberta will lobby the provincial government to enact improvements to Alberta's Workers' Compensation and Occupational Health and Safety legislation to better promote mental health in the workplace.

Action #21

CUPE Alberta will evaluate and provide feedback on the Alberta Mental Health Review Committee Recommendations and lobby for the implementation of the recommendations supported by CUPE.

Action #22

CUPE Alberta will lobby the federal government to implement the 94 recommendations from the summary report released by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on June 2, 2015 to reduce and repair the damage inflicted on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples by the Indian Residential School system.

Action #23

CUPE Alberta will continue to advocate for better funding for K-12 education.

Action #24

CUPE Alberta will continue to support better classroom supports for special needs students.

Action #25

CUPE Alberta will support actions designed to make schools supportive atmospheres for students.

Privatization

Pro-privatization interest groups will be keen to capitalize on the significant infrastructure money promised by the federal and provincial governments.

P3 financing of public infrastructure is more expensive and more risky than public financing. Contracting out public services costs more and delivers less. Workers suffer, as their jobs and collective agreement rights are eliminated.

CUPE must work with members, provincial and municipal governments to limit the use of P3s and contracting out in Alberta.

Action #26

CUPE Alberta will assist CUPE Locals in lobbying local governments to stop using P3s, including through educating local governments on the costs of P3s and on alternative financing models.

Action #27

CUPE Alberta will continue to lobby the Alberta government to prohibit the use of P3s for all new capital projects.

Action #28

CUPE Alberta will lobby Alberta's provincial and local governments to increase transparency regarding capital projects and service contracts including complete disclosure of the financial details of P3 business cases and contracts.

Action #29

CUPE Alberta will lobby the Alberta government to pass contracting out successorship legislation.

Supporting an Aging Population

Over 1,500 Alberta seniors are on wait lists for continuing care placement and staffing levels in long-term care facilities are too low. Government should divert fewer, of the already limited, seniors care dollars to private sector profits and invest in quality public seniors' care. These investments will need to be accompanied by standards and enforcement mechanisms to ensure that quality care is actually being delivered.

The Alberta NDP platform included promises to create 2,000 public long-term care beds and phase in a new model for expanded public homecare. CUPE should work to hold them to these promises.

Action #30

CUPE Alberta will lobby the Alberta government to enact reasonable minimum standards for seniors' care, with appropriate funding and enforcement mechanisms.

Action #31

CUPE Alberta will lobby Alberta's provincial and local governments to open more public long-term care and home care services for Albertans, with appropriate funding.

Action #32

CUPE Alberta will continue to work with seniors' care coalitions throughout the province.

INTRODUCTION

Stormy economic skies followed Alberta from 2015 into 2016. Years of misdirected policy has made it difficult for Alberta to weather the storm. Alberta's 2017 economic outlook will depend on decisions made in the very near term, including policy decisions made by government and the public's desire for change.

Labour also has an important role to play in enhancing Alberta's future. Conservative interests will do their best to capitalize on Alberta's economic woes to shrink taxes and public services, and expand privatization. If we want an Alberta with a robust economy, quality public services and infrastructure, and quality jobs for Albertans, we will need to be innovative and act strategically to stymie conservative efforts and renew the Alberta advantage.

THE ECONOMY

Global oil prices have taken a nosedive. Between 2010 and 2014, ample demand for oil vaulted prices to the \$100 USD per barrel range. Regional conflicts restricted supply, helping to augment prices. Those high prices resulted in increased exploration and innovation, including fracking, directional drilling and steam extraction - leading to even more exploration and an explosion of production.

Mid-2014 saw global demand start to wane, as production kept climbing. That's when prices started to fall. OPEC members did not cut production and neither did anyone else. Oil production continued to rise.¹

Meanwhile, weak economic outlooks in China, Russia and Brazil continue to soften demand and Iran is back in the global market, further adding to supply.

Then, there is the global inventories of oil. As prices plummeted, oil started being socked away for post rebound sale. But the price has yet to rebound and global inventories

increased by a billion barrels in 2014-2015.² The International Energy Agency speculates that oil could continue to dive:

... The strength of the dollar will inevitably impact on local currency costs for oil importers and thus exert pressure on oil demand growth. For China, for so long the engine of global demand growth, we expect demand to increase by 350 [thousand barrels per day], below the recent trend level.

Although we do not formally forecast OPEC oil production, in a scenario whereby Iran adds 600 kb/d to the market by mid-year and other members maintain current output, global oil supply could exceed demand by 1.5 [million barrels per day] in the first half of 2016. While the pace of stock building eases in the second half of the year as supply from non-OPEC producers falls, unless something changes, the oil market could drown in over-supply. So the answer to our question is an emphatic yes. It could go lower.³

Crude oil can be light (less viscous) or heavy (more viscous), sour (more sulphur) or sweet (less sulphur). Refiners prefer light, sweet crude oil because it requires less effort to produce a greater yield of higher value products. The heavy, sour oil produced from Bitumen in Alberta trades at a discount compared to light, sweet oil.^{4 5}

For example, in June 2014, just before the crash, West Texas Intermediate (WTI) (light, sweet North American crude) was trading at \$105.15 USD per barrel, while Western Canadian Select (WCS) (heavy, sour North American crude) was trading at \$86.56 USD per barrel. By December 2015, WTI was trading at \$37.33 and WCS was trading at \$22.51.⁶

The price on heavy crude has dropped to a point where some producers are losing money on the oil they are selling; and new projects simply do not make sense. Companies in the sands are loath to shut down because of the risk to their equipment and the oilfield, but they cannot run on fumes forever.⁷

Neither can Albertans. If there are no jobs to replace the petro-jobs we have already lost, and those hanging on by a thread, Alberta's economic situation could get a lot worse in a hurry.

Alberta is the only Canadian province to broadly offer non-recourse residential mortgages. Those are loans with at least a 20 per cent down payment and thus are not insured by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC).

Jingle mail — the act of walking away from an underwater mortgage by mailing your keys back to the bank — is a peculiarity of the Alberta residential market and an act of desperation. However, a combination of high debt and lost jobs make it an option in a province going through a significant economic reckoning.

"We're slowly starting to see it in Grande Prairie and Fort Mac," said Don Campbell, senior analyst with the Real Estate Investment Network.

If you walk away, you lose your home, but otherwise have no personal liability. Elsewhere in Canada, your lender can take you to court and seize other assets, such as RRSPs, vehicles, and even garnishee your wages.⁸

Alberta clearly needs an economic boost, but has limited options, especially in the short-term. Essentially, there are two levers. The Bank of Canada ("BoC") can decrease its key interest rate (monetary policy) and government can increase (or decrease) public spending and taxes (fiscal policy).

The BoC key interest rate (also known as the target for the overnight rate⁹) stands at 0.5%. That does not leave a lot of room for cuts. The BoC is a mere 25 basis points away from its record low rate, seen in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis.¹⁰

Late last year, the European Central Bank dropped its deposit rate to minus 0.3% (meaning that it charges banks 0.3% to hold their cash) and the Bank of Japan (BOJ) followed suit, cutting its interest rate to minus 0.1% at the end of January 2016.¹¹

BoC Governor, Stephen Poloz has suggested that BoC might be willing to go as low as minus 0.5%. But Poloz said BoC had no plans for negative rates. However, that is exactly what BoJ Governor, Haruhiko Kuroda said less than two weeks before his surprise trek into negative territory.¹²

Nonetheless, January's policy announcement saw BoC holding steady at 0.5%, opting to see what the federal government had in store in terms of stimulus before making any moves. The next interest rate announcement is scheduled for March 9, 2016.^{13 14}

That leaves fiscal policy. Both the federal and provincial government have announced that they will make substantial investments in public infrastructure, which is good timing because Alberta's economy isn't the only thing in Alberta that needs a boost.

The 2016 "Canadian Infrastructure Report Card" produced by the Canadian Construction Association, the Canadian Public Works Association, the Canadian Society for Civil Engineering and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, indicates that about 1/3 of Canada's municipal infrastructure, or \$141B worth, is in poor or very poor condition.¹⁵ In its August 2015 Budget and capital plan submission, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association estimated the municipal infrastructure deficit in Alberta at \$26B.¹⁶

Alberta also urgently needs a well thought out, yet aggressive, strategy for diversifying its petro-heavy economy. Government must ensure that its resources are directed towards a more diversified economy.

But it's complicated. With supply vastly outstripping demand, sustained production could put downward pressure on oil and gas prices. Meanwhile, in the short-term, stalling production puts more Albertans out of work.

Intensive investment in sustainable petro-alternative energy technology, production, transmission and distribution is an attractive option. Alberta has lots of sunshine and wind.¹⁷ Harnessing and distributing it as energy would diversify the economy and provide jobs.

The UN is urging a quicker pace for sustainable, clean energy investment and in late January, UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon outlined five steps he thinks are needed. The steps he advised included pension funds using "their influence as investors and shareholders to accelerate the rapid decarbonisation of the economy" and that the banking sector should "continue scaling up the green bond market while changing its lending practices to support green investments and reflect the growing risk inherent in the brown economy."¹⁸

It just so happens that Alberta owns a bank (ATB) and an investment company (Alberta Investment Management Corp (AIMCo)). AIMCo manages almost \$40B in pension funds¹⁹ including the LAPP fund.

Ki-Moon also challenged governments “to create a level playing field for clean energy investment through carbon pricing, removing fossil fuel subsidies, and strengthening stable and predictable regulator and investment environments.”

Alberta was the first jurisdiction in North America to introduce carbon pricing in 2007 in its *Specified Gas Emitters Regulation (SGER)*.²⁰ The NDP’s Climate Leadership Plan builds on this regulation in a number of ways including expanding who has to pay and upping the price on carbon to \$20 per tonne starting January 2017 and \$30 by 2018.

Alberta’s 2015 Capital Plan includes a \$34B infrastructure investment over 5 years. The feds promised to double federal infrastructure spending to \$125B over the next decade.

The additional \$60B in federal dollars is expected to be spent on public transit, social infrastructure (affordable housing, seniors’ and childcare facilities, and recreational infrastructure), and “greener communities”, including local water and wastewater facilities, environmental retrofits and clean energy.

The trick is in the timing. The feds only plan to spend about \$17B in new money over the next four years²¹, with the first \$10B expected for new projects, repairs or recapitalization before 2018.²² However, on February 3, 2016, the feds committed to expedite \$700M of the existing Building Canada allocation to Alberta.²³

Such investments present an opportunity to heal Alberta’s ailing infrastructure and economy and tip the scales in favour of public ownership/maintenance/operation of Alberta’s public infrastructure.

However, these funds also present an attractive target to pro-privatization interest groups who already have syphons in hand.²⁴

ACTIONS

CUPE Alberta will:

- continue to lobby the Alberta government to continue to invest in public services and infrastructure even as government revenues decrease.
- lobby the provincial government to diversify Alberta’s economy.

- advocate for the development of public petro-alternative energy technology, production, transmission and distribution, and the establishment of petro-alternative jobs, in Alberta.
- advocate for increasing ‘value added’ industries in the province, such as upgrading and processing of raw energy resources, to get more jobs for every barrel of oil extracted.

POVERTY AND HOMELESSNESS

Alberta’s economy is collapsing under the weight of falling oil and gas prices and the impact of this collapse extends well beyond the oil patch, with about 2 indirect jobs lost for every 1 in the oil and gas sector.²⁵

Back in 2012, Vibrant Calgary and Action to End Poverty in Alberta estimated that the annual price tag on Albertan poverty was between \$7.1B and \$9.5B, including \$1.2B in health care costs and \$560M in costs attributable to crime.²⁶

Alberta is already seeing elevated levels of property crime, food bank usage and mental ill-health. In December 2015, police reported that commercial break-ins in Calgary had almost doubled; bank robberies increased by 65% and home invasions were up 52%.²⁷

The November 2015 EI roll hosted double the number of Albertans as compared to last year and December 2015’s unemployment rate surpassed 2014’s 4.8%, at 7%.²⁸ The extra EI recipients were disproportionately men, which will likely mean a disproportionate reduction in income, with women earning about 40% less than men²⁹ and making up 69% of the low wage work force.³⁰

Alberta is eyeing Ottawa for an augmented EI system to help ease the blow of Alberta’s soaring jobless count, as tens of thousands of Albertans struggle to get back on their feet within the 40-week grace period EI provides for out of work Albertans.³¹

While Canada’s dragging dollar has likely buoyed Canada’s labour market, it is making it difficult for Albertans to put healthy food on the table. Canada imports most (approximately 80%) of its fresh fruits and vegetables. As the buying power of the loonie

deteriorates, grocery store prices increase.³² The price of fruits and vegetables increased by about 10% last year, with more price hikes expected.³³

Lower-income households are most severely affected because food generally accounts for a larger chunk of their income and the number of lower-income households can be expected to rise as layoffs stack up.

Getting Albertan's back to work is critical to staving off increased levels of poverty in Alberta. However, in Alberta, having a job does not guarantee living out of poverty.

In 2009, when Alberta announced its 10 year plan to end homelessness, becoming the first province to commit to ending homelessness, 25% of Alberta's homeless population were employed.

In 2012, 143,200 Albertan kids already lived below the poverty line and most of these kids lived in families with one or more full-time workers.³⁴ This is not surprising given that over 414,000 Albertans earn \$16 per hour or less.³⁵

Investing in public housing will provide jobs and low-cost housing for Albertans while shrinking Alberta's annual poverty related costs.^{36 37} Alberta's plan to end homelessness included a promise to provide permanent housing and support to Alberta's homeless population. The 2009 price tag on moving 11,000 Albertan individuals and families out of homelessness was \$3.3 billion.³⁸

The Alberta government has invested little in social housing since 2011.³⁹ Meanwhile, in Edmonton alone, the number of families on the waiting list for social housing shot up to 4000 in December last year, from 1,200 in September 2014,⁴⁰ despite significant progress made by municipalities. In 2009, Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer and Wood Buffalo adopted the Housing First model.

Housing First is a recovery-oriented approach to homelessness that involves moving people who experience homelessness into independent and permanent housing as quickly as possible, with no preconditions, and then providing them with additional services and supports as needed. The underlying principle of Housing First is that people are more successful in moving forward with their lives if they are first housed. This is as true for homeless people and those with mental health and addiction issues as it is for anyone.

Housing is not contingent upon readiness, or on ‘compliance’ (for instance, sobriety). Rather, it is a rights-based intervention rooted in the philosophy that all people deserve housing, and that adequate housing is a precondition for recovery.⁴¹

By 2014 the seven cities had collectively housed 9,865 homeless Albertans and graduated 3,250 from the Housing First program.⁴²

By February 2015, Lethbridge cut its number of homeless to 140 from 276 in 2008⁴³ and by May 2015, 875 Medicine Hatters (595 adults and 280 children) had secure homes in supportive or subsidized housing.⁴⁴

Unfortunately, the 2014 Alberta Point-in-Time Homeless Count revealed a remaining 6,663 homeless individuals across the seven cities.⁴⁵

Help may be on the way – at least for Calgary and Edmonton. On January 27, 2016 the two cities’ mayors met with provincial cabinet to talk about collaboration on affordable housing and poverty reduction.⁴⁶

The importance of helping Albertans stay out of poverty goes beyond finances. Poverty is a powerful determinant of health.⁴⁷ Low income Canadians suffer more illness and die younger. A Canadian Institute on Child’s Health paper from 1994, *Health of Canada’s Children Report*, compared health and well-being between poor children and children who were not poor:

Health differences were seen in the incidence of illness and death, hospital stays, accidental injuries, mental health and well-being, school achievement and drop-out, family violence and child abuse, among others. In fact, poor children showed higher incidences of just about any health-related problem, however defined.⁴⁸

Elements of the connection between poverty and health include access to food, shelter, safe water and air, and access to health services including dental care, eye care, and access to prescription medication.⁴⁹

Canada’s universal health care system does not cover eye care, dental care or prescription drugs. Having a union job can help. In 2002, Statistics Canada reported that, unionized workers were more likely to be covered by extended medical plans, dental plans and

life/disability insurance plans.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, Alberta has the lowest unionization rate (21.8% of all employees are members of a union) of any province in Canada.⁵¹

As labour supply exceeds demand, it is more important than ever to ensure that all Albertans have access to a living wage and are protected by progressive employment and health and safety standards.

Reasonable legislated minimum workplace standards are essential, but unions also have an important role to play. Unionization provides workers with greater job security and tends to elevate wages, benefits and workplace safety.^{52 53 54}

ACTIONS

CUPE Alberta will:

- work with CUPE Locals to encourage Alberta employers to become living wage employers.
- advocate for the implementation of Alberta's 10 year plan to end homelessness.
- lobby the provincial government to further increase the minimum wage and improve employment standards and enforcement mechanisms, including Alberta's *Employment Standards Code* and Occupational Health and Safety legislation.
- lobby the provincial government to amend the *Labour Relations Code* to make it easier to form a union and bargain a fair collective agreement.
- advocate for the expansion of universal health care coverage.
- work with CUPE Locals in supporting the development of school meal programs.
- advocate for Housing First programs for those with addiction and mental health challenges.

INCREASING CUPE'S BARGAINING POWER

When the NDP took power last year they estimated that the deficit would be \$6.1B for 2015-2016 and targeted a \$5.4B deficit for 2016-2017.

The 2016-2017 target deficit was based on oil trading at over double the year to date average price (as of February 11, 2016)⁵⁵ and provincial revenues take a \$170M hit for every \$1 drop in the average price of oil. Government is looking to tighten its belt.⁵⁶

In January 2016, Alberta's Finance Minister, Joe Ceci announced a two year salary freeze for cabinet ministers, MLAs, political staff and approximately 7000 non-union government employees. So far, Ceci says government will not make big cuts to front-line services.⁵⁷

However, with falling provincial revenues, public sector unions must remain vigilant.

Alberta's challenging economic situation will likely create challenging bargaining situations with both public and private sector employers. CUPE can increase its bargaining power, even in these difficult times, by organizing new members and building stronger relationships with our existing members and our community.

Alberta has the lowest unionization rate in Canada. As unemployment in Alberta rises, unscrupulous employers will exploit the surplus in labour to diminish wages and working conditions. For workers without union representation and a grievance procedure, they might just get away with it. Therefore, CUPE must work with its fellow community members to push back against descending working conditions.

An essential element of this push back is organizing new members to counterbalance employer power. Another essential element of this push back is building strong community relationships, such that our community knows that CUPE will be there when it needs support and CUPE knows that our community will be there when CUPE needs support.

The *Alberta Labour Relations Code* (the "Code") also plays an important role in counterbalancing employer power. However, the existing Code does not provide an

appropriate balance. Amendments are needed to rationalize the process for organizing workers and getting them a collective agreement.

For example, the Code should be amended to provide for: automatic certification where a union has signed up more than 50 percent of a bargaining unit and where an employer is found guilty of breaking the rules during an organizing campaign; collective agreement arbitration for contentious first-agreement negotiations and bad faith bargaining situations; a ban on the use of replacement workers; and an essential services regime that is in line with recent Supreme Court rulings.

ACTIONS

CUPE Alberta will:

- endorse CUPE National's strategy for organizing.
- oppose efforts to break contracts with public sector workers.
- continue to strengthen and build relationships with community partners.

PENSIONS

Almost half of Canadians aged 55 - 64 do not have an employer pension and the vast majority of these Canadians do not have enough money to retire on.⁵⁸

The Canada Pension Plan (CPP) is part of Canada's public retirement income system. CPP is funded through contributions made by workers and employers. Only workers who have contributed to the plan can access CPP benefits and benefits are dependent on the duration and amount of an individual's contributions.

CPP benefit levels are too low. An average pensioner receives just \$550 per month and the maximum monthly benefit (2015) is capped at \$1,065.⁵⁹

A modest, phased-in increase to contribution rates could fund a doubling of CPP benefits. Expanding CPP would bring greater retirement security to Albertans and would benefit Alberta's economy by putting more spending money in the pockets of retirees.⁶⁰

In order for CPP to be amended, the federal government and 2/3 of the included provinces, making up 2/3 of the population, must agree to the amendments. The support and leadership of the Alberta government is crucial.

Workplace pension plans, like the Local Authorities Pension Plan (LAPP) provide retirement income in addition to CPP.

In addition to providing seniors with money for their retirement, workplace pension plans reduce pressure on public seniors programs, like the Alberta Seniors Benefit, that base eligibility on earnings.⁶¹ In 2014, LAPP paid out \$886M in benefits to more than 55,000 pensioners.⁶²

Pension plan governance processes determine what a pension's contribution rates and benefit levels will be. Currently, the Minister of Finance is the sole legal trustee of LAPP. Nonetheless, employees help pay for the plan and automatically share in the risk.⁶³ As such, they should be active participants in decision making around plan design, as is typical in other provinces. That is why CUPE, in conjunction with Alberta's Labour Coalition on Pensions, has been lobbying the provincial government to establish joint governance of LAPP.

ACTIONS

CUPE Alberta will:

- continue to lobby the Alberta government to make the changes necessary to establish joint governance of LAPP.
- continue to support the expansion of the CPP and work with the Canadian Labour Congress, the Alberta Federation of Labour and other unions to double the CPP.
- lobby the Alberta government to support the expansion of the CPP.
- lobby the federal government to support the expansion of the CPP.

MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

Whether personally suffering, or working with a colleague who suffers from mental ill-health, or dealing with mental ill-health or its prevention as part of job duties, most, if not all, CUPE members encounter issues relating to mental health at work at some point in their careers.

About 1 in 5 Canadians will suffer from mental illness in their lifetime.⁶⁴ RiskAnalytica estimated that there were over 6.7 million Canadians living with a mental illness in 2011 and projected that there would be a 31% increase in Canadians living with a mental illness by 2041, 1.2 million of those are expected to be kids 19 years and younger.⁶⁵

Stigma and the risk of being discriminated against often causes those suffering with mental ill-health to do so in silence. Stigma prevents an estimated 2/3 of individuals experiencing mental illness from seeking help and can reduce access to social support networks, which are critical to mental health and well-being.⁶⁶

Stigma around mental illness has disastrous consequences. In early 2015, Edmonton paramedic Greg Turner died from a self-administered lethal dose of medication. His best friend and long-time partner Keith Weller was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder not long after and realized that he had been suffering with the disease for a long-time.

Despite their closeness both on and off the job, neither Weller nor Turner had ever spoken about it to the other.

"That's just the way it is with paramedics," shrugs Weller. "We mask things. We don't like to show signs of weakness, especially to our peers, so we don't talk about it."⁶⁷

Thirty-nine Canadian first responders died by suicide in 2015 and five first responders died by suicide in the first month of 2016.⁶⁸

Alberta's emergency rooms see 6,000 self-inflicted injuries every year.⁶⁹ Suicides are up 30% over last year. This year, Alberta is on track to lose 150 lives to suicide over the average 500.⁷⁰

Suicide and self-inflicted injuries are the number two cause of death for Canadian youth⁷¹ and the number one cause of death for First Nations under the age of 44.⁷² Between 20 and 25 percent of Inuit people, First Nations living off reserve and Métis between the ages of 26 and 59 reported having ever had suicidal thoughts.⁷³

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada called upon the federal government, in consultation with Aboriginal peoples to identify and close the gaps in health outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, focusing on indicators including suicide, mental health and addictions.

Prevention is essential. At least 75% of mental health issues begin during childhood or adolescence.⁷⁴ Mental and emotional well-being is affected by very early life experiences. Educating parents, providing family supports (like home visits) and early childhood education results in improved mental health outcomes, with an estimated return on investment of between \$1.80 and \$17.07 for every dollar invested.⁷⁵

The estimated lifetime savings of improving one child's mental health from moderate to high is \$140,000 and \$280,000 for preventing conduct disorders in one child.⁷⁶

The cost of mental ill-health to the Canadian economy is upwards of \$50B. Of this, \$21.3B are health care dollars.⁷⁷ Preventing mental injuries⁷⁸ at work alone could result in annual saving of between \$3B and \$11B.⁷⁹

Working conditions have a profound impact on mental health and well-being. Workers in high demand, high effort jobs with low control and low reward are at greater risk of psychological health repercussions.⁸⁰

...mental distress can come from both work and home. But not all people suffering from mental distress or illnesses walk into the workplace that way. Workers may enter the workplace in full control of their mental distress and then work factors may cause effects that never would have occurred otherwise. Therefore, "accommodating" the condition or providing tools to deal with mental distress may simply not be enough. While those approaches are important, work factors need to be examined and addressed to truly make a difference.

...

...the truth is, workplace psychosocial hazards (such as work overload, lack of recognition and rewards, unreasonable or unmanageable deadlines, short-staffing situations, difficult working relationships, pressure for early return to work of injured workers, lack of support from supervisors and colleagues, bullying and harassment, job insecurity, emotional aspects of work) can distress individuals in the workplace causing devastating effects that have potentially permanent consequences. When an individual struggles with work pressures, burdens, or worries large enough or long enough to overcome their coping skills he or she will experience mental distress.

As many as a quarter of Canadian workplaces are mentally injurious.⁸¹ Five hundred thousand employed Canadians are unable to work due to mental ill-health each week⁸² and mental ill-health is a significant cost driver for benefit plans accounting for about 30% of short-term and long-term disability claims.⁸³

Businesses face problems with loyalty and retention and rising costs from higher turnover, lower productivity and increased disability leave. In a recent major Canadian study, 82% of responding organizations ranked mental health conditions in their top three causes of short-term disability (72% for long-term). In fact, the average responding organization reported spending more than \$10.5 million annually on absence claims. Overall, it is estimated that between \$2.97 billion and \$11 billion could be saved every year in Canada if mental injuries to employees attributable in whole or in part to negligent, reckless and intentional acts and omissions of employers, their agents and fellow employees were to be prevented.⁸⁴

Some progress is being made. In 2012 the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers in conjunction with several provincial unions and the Ontario Federation of Labour, launched a Mental Injury Tool Kit. The Kit was created for workers, by workers, and provides resources and guidance for understanding and dealing with workplace stress.⁸⁵

In 2013, the Canadian Standards Association published a voluntary national standard, to guide employers towards providing psychologically safe and healthy workplaces. Consideration is given to thirteen organizational factors including workload management; work/life balance; clear leadership and expectations; civility and respect;

psychological support; recognition and reward; involvement and influence; and psychological protection from violence, bullying and harassment.⁸⁶

Improving the mental health of Albertans will benefit Albertan families and contribute to the sustainability of Canada's public health care system, benefit plans and economic prosperity. But in July 2015, Alberta's Auditor General reported that "[f]or the most part...the delivery of front line addiction and mental health services remains unintegrated and allows ongoing gaps in service continuity" and that the Department of Health "failed to properly execute" its 2011 five-year mental health and addictions strategy.⁸⁷

Last June, Premier Notley announced that the NDP government would be undertaking a review of Alberta's mental health and addiction system. The final report hit Health Minister Sarah Hoffman's desk late last year and was released to the public on February 22, 2016.⁸⁸ The report includes about 32 recommendations. The Alberta government has accepted the report in principle but has only announced immediate action on 6 recommendations.

ACTIONS

CUPE Alberta will:

- lobby employers to adopt the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace.
- support member driven campaigns to increase mental health awareness and decrease stigmas around mental health.
- lobby the provincial government to enact improvements to Alberta's Workers' Compensation and Occupational Health and Safety legislation to better promote mental health in the workplace.
- evaluate and provide feedback on the Alberta Mental Health Review Committee Recommendations and promote the implementation of recommendations supported by CUPE.

- lobby the federal government to implement the 94 recommendations from the summary report released by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on June 2, 2015 to reduce and repair the damage inflicted on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples by the Indian Residential School system.
- continue to advocate for better funding for K-12 education.
- continue to support better classroom supports for special needs students.
- support actions designed to make schools supportive atmospheres for students.

PRIVATIZATION

WHAT IS PRIVATIZATION?

Privatization is a broad label for the transfer of public property, business, or services from Government to the private sector. There are three main types of Privatization, explained below.

Selling a Government Enterprise

Selling a Government Enterprise – This type of privatization is the wholesale transfer of a government enterprise to the private sector and can be likened to the sale of a business. Public assets and the services delivered through those assets are sold to the private sector.

Government can see a short-term financial gain from this type of privatization as it sells off its stake to the public sector. However, in the long term, government is no longer able to generate revenue from that enterprise and there can be additional economic and social consequences for members of the public.

This type of privatization can happen through a direct sale from the government to an existing private sector entity or by issuing shares.

Sometimes this type of privatization is preceded by “corporatization”. Corporatization is the process of taking an activity that is under direct government administrative control, separating that activity from direct government administrative control and making it a distinct legal entity. Government retains formal ownership.

Corporatization makes it easier to privatize because it creates a distinct business that can be sold. However, corporatization does not always result in Privatization.⁸⁹

Public Private Partnerships

P3 (a.k.a. "Public-Private Partnership", a.k.a. "PPP") – A P3 is a partnership between a public sector entity and a private sector entity or entities. The private sector partner agrees to finance, design, build and maintain certain public infrastructure. In some cases the private sector partner will also provide other services in relation to the facility. In exchange, the public sector partner agrees to pay the private sector partner for the infrastructure and related services, and/or to allow the private sector partner to collect tolls or user fees for a period of time after the construction phase of the project is complete, usually decades.

The owner of the infrastructure at the end of the contract will depend on the terms of the contract. However, in most cases, the public sector partner will own the infrastructure.

Arrangements wherein a public sector entity contracts with a private sector entity to provide a service (i.e., contracting out work), use of an asset, or combination of the two (e.g., funding a care bed in a long-term care facility) will be considered under outsourcing.

Outsourcing

Outsourcing (a.k.a. Contracting Out) – Outsourcing is, generally speaking, the transfer of work only. Outsourcing is engaging a private sector entity (a.k.a. a contractor) to provide a discrete service that is traditionally performed in-house. The private sector contractor may or may not be required to provide the assets necessary for the performance of that service.

Of the three types of privatization, outsourcing requires the least government divestment. If the service contract permits, a contractor may also outsource all or part of the service to a sub-contractor.

While it is important to understand the different kinds of privatization, only P3s and outsourcing are discussed below.

PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

P3 financing almost always has a higher interest rate compared to direct municipal borrowing. This premium might make sense if the risk of the project and delivery of the services could be contracted out. However, because the public sector partner will always ultimately be responsible for delivering the public services they are financing, it is almost impossible (or at least prohibitively expensive) to transfer all of the risk to the private sector partner.

The transactional costs for P3s, including legal and technical advice and administering the bidding process, also generally exceed those of conventional public sector procurement, with average P3 transaction costs more than double those for conventional procurement.⁹⁰

The public does not always go into these deals knowing the risks. Government generally prepares (or hires someone else to prepare) a business case before undertaking a P3 project. A business case provides the rationale for the proposed project and provides an assessment of value for money and risk. P3-friendly consultants can use creative accounting in preparing business cases to make P3s appear less risky and less expensive than they actually are. Without full transparency and access to the numbers, the public may not know the true risks and costs of a project until it is millions of dollars too late.

P3s have been aggressively marketed in Canada. Holdouts received a rather forceful push in 2011 when, then Prime Minister, Stephen Harper required all major infrastructure projects to go through a “P3 screening” before federal funding was on the table. Late last year, the Liberal Government announced that it would no longer require municipalities and provinces to consider P3s before federal support was on the table for their projects.⁹¹ While this is excellent news, pro-privatization interest groups will no doubt be ramping up their efforts to maximize their take of the federal and provincial infrastructure investments.

Depending exclusively on federal and provincial funding/loans for municipal infrastructure is a risky long-term strategy. Such dependence gives the federal/provincial government a tremendous amount of power over the pace of privatization. The government of the day may be investing in infrastructure in a way that does not require

privatization, but what happens when the money stops flowing, or once again comes with privatization requirements?

Municipalities that do not have enough cash or borrowing capacity to finance a project on their own or through a cost share and that cannot access the federal or provincial financing options in time to meet their needs (or at all) may turn to the private sector for financing. The money comes with strings, risks and markups, but it is accessible to municipalities in the sense that it is available right now and in the sense that municipalities know how to get at it.

Therefore, in addition to understanding the problems with P3s, municipalities need an accessible replacement for the apparently easy money that the private sector is eager to invest.

Late last year, an unnamed “former government official” completed a review of the costs and benefits of public-private partnerships for the Alberta NDP government. The results of this review have not been made public and as of November 2015, government was still considering the report and had yet to determine, “whether or not P3s are a model that gives value to the government in the development of major projects.”⁹²

OUTSOURCING

When a unionized employer contracts out, legally obtained certifications and freely negotiated collective agreement rights disappear. Employees are required to reapply for their jobs, which often come with lower wages and fewer benefits.

Contracting out can also have negative effects on worker health including anxiety, depression and higher injury rates.⁹³

Higher injury rates could be a greater risk in Alberta where workers are only permitted to refuse work on reasonable and probable grounds, joint health and safety committees are not mandatory and the 2013/2014 Occupational Health and Safety Inspection rates indicate that less than 6 businesses are inspected for every 100.⁹⁴ In 2014, there were 54,500 disabling injury claims in Alberta and 43,428 modified-work claims. The disabling injury claims rate for young workers in 2007 (22.7% of all disabling claims) were slightly higher than their relative participation in the workforce (18% of the total workforce).⁹⁵

The quality of service provided also often suffers as contractors minimize staffing and supplies to maximize their profits.⁹⁶ For example, Alberta's publicly owned long-term-care facilities provide more hours of care to facility residents than do private sector facilities.⁹⁷

Successorship provisions are designed to ensure that collective bargaining rights are not lost as a result of certain business transactions. Basically, if a business is transferred in the manner contemplated by the relevant successorship provision, the bargaining agent, certification and collective agreement transfer with the business.

The *Alberta Labour Relations Code* (the "Code") provides for successorship, but the provision will generally not be triggered by a transfer of work alone, from one company to another.

It is possible to legislate successorship in contracting out situations. For example, until it was repealed in 2014, the Saskatchewan *Trade Union Act*, provided for successorship where certain services being provided to a public institution or at a building owned by government (provincial or municipal) were contracted out.⁹⁸

Contracting out successorship limits an employer's ability to escape its collective agreement obligations by rearranging its business.

ACTIONS

CUPE Alberta will:

- assist CUPE Locals in lobbying local governments to stop using P3s, including through educating local governments on the costs of P3s and on alternative financing models.
- continue to lobby the Alberta government to prohibit the use of P3s for all new capital projects.
- lobby Alberta's provincial and local governments to increase transparency regarding capital projects and service contracts including complete disclosure of the financial details of P3 business cases and contracts.
- lobby the Alberta government to pass contracting out successorship legislation.

SUPPORTING AN AGING POPULATION

The importance of long-term care goes beyond the \$910 million that the province has spent on it last year alone. If long-term care delivery isn't done right, it can have significant negative impact on the cost and capacity of the rest of the healthcare system. More importantly, without good systems to support long-term care delivery, some Albertans may not have an opportunity to spend their final years in the best possible health.⁹⁹

- Alberta Auditor General Merwan Saher in his October 2014 Follow-Up Audit of Health and Alberta Health Services – Seniors Care in long-term care facilities.

The right mix of seniors' care services can reduce healthcare costs and emergency room wait times and improve quality of life.¹⁰⁰ Most people want to stay in their home for as long as possible as they age and home care is more cost-effective than long-term care. However, as an individual's care needs increase, seniors require timely access to quality long-term care facilities.

Unfortunately, Canada's existing home care and long-term care services are insufficient. A 2015 study by the Conference Board of Canada reported that 461,000 Canadians were not getting the home care they required and 331,000 were getting less home care than they required.¹⁰¹

When they need access to long-term care, Alberta seniors spend an average of 42 days waiting for a continuing care placement in a hospital bed. As of March 31, 2015, there were 1,544 Albertan seniors waiting for a continuing care placement and 690 of those individuals were waiting in a hospital bed.¹⁰²

In October 2014, Alberta Auditor General Merwan Saher found Alberta's long-term care system lacking. Specifically, he recommended that Alberta Health Services beef up its role in monitoring long-term care facilities to ensure that they are actually providing appropriate care and adequate staffing.

A 2015 Health Quality Council of Alberta study reported that four of the top five recommendations from long-term care resident family members were related to

insufficient staffing and that the majority of family members felt that there was a chronic staff shortage at their family member's facility:¹⁰³

Family members said that they experienced low staff-to-resident ratios, understaffing, poor staff scheduling especially at high-needs times (e.g., meal times and shift changes), and unavailability of replacement staff in times of staff illness. Overall, they expressed that when low numbers of staff were available, basic care needs such as toileting, transferring, rotating, bathing, and feeding were rushed, overlooked, or not met. In addition, family members said they felt low staffing levels increased staff's risk of making an error, reduced quality of care provided, and had negative consequences for residents' overall health and well-being. ...

...

Family members expressed concern that when staff turnover was high, when casual as opposed to permanent full-time staff was employed, or when staff were rotated throughout the facility, residents were unable to establish trusting relationships with them. This prevented staff from becoming familiar with resident care needs, disrupted resident routines, and prevented residents from accepting staff's help.

Family members also discussed the impact low staffing numbers had on staff. Specifically, staff was expected to take on greater responsibility and accomplish more work during their shift than family members thought reasonable. They conveyed concern that staff morale was low because staff sometimes had to compromise quality of care in favour of efficiency. This, according to family members, placed staff at risk of burnout, low job satisfaction, and high turnover.

Alberta's long-term care facilities should be required to provide the 4.1 hours of hands-on nursing and personal support per resident per day required to avoid jeopardizing the health and safety of long-term care residents.¹⁰⁴

Public delivery of long-term care is also an important element in the quality and sustainability of seniors' care in Alberta. For almost two decades, the Alberta government has privatized and offloaded seniors care to the detriment of Albertans and the profit of the private sector.

In 1999, about half of Alberta's senior care beds were publicly operated. As of March 31, 2015, only about 30% of long-term care beds and 5% of supportive living beds were located in facilities operated by Alberta Health Services.¹⁰⁵ The remaining are beds operated by the for-profit and not-for-profit sector. A 2013 report by the Parkland Institute found that:

While providing inferior care, [Alberta's for-profit residential elder care sector] generate substantial profits. Between 1999 and 2009, private long-term care facilities in the province had an average return on investment [ROI] of 2.1%. Private [assisted living] facilities had much higher returns over that time, with an average ROI of 9.14%. This means that in recent years the returns received by the private residential elder care industry in Alberta have been higher than those of the US stock market, which over the same time-frame had an average return of 1.23%.¹⁰⁶

The proportion of Albertans aged 65 or older is expected to increase to 19% (up from 11% in 2014) by 2041.¹⁰⁷ Dementia rates will grow as the population ages. In 2011, the cost of dementia in Canada was estimated at \$33 billion, when about 750,000 Canadians were living with dementia. It is expected that more than 1.4 million Canadians will be living with dementia by 2030.¹⁰⁸

If nothing changes, there will be a funding gap for long-term care over the next 35 years. A recent report by the Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association claims that the cost in current dollars of providing long-term care over the next 35 years is conservatively estimated to be almost \$1.2 trillion; current levels of government program and funding support will cover approximately half of that (about \$595 billion). That leaves Canadians with an unfunded long-term care liability of \$590 billion, which is the equivalent of about 95% of all individual registered savings plans in Canada today.¹⁰⁹

That kind of cash is going to get harder and harder to raise. The number of Albertans between 15 and 64 is expected to shrink from 58% of Alberta's population to 44% by 2041 and Alberta's tax base will shrink along with it.¹¹⁰ Therefore, Alberta urgently needs to establish an efficient, high quality public seniors' care regime.

We may start seeing some progress. The Alberta NDP platform included promises to create 2,000 public long-term care beds over four years, phase in a new model for expanded public homecare and end privatization.

The priorities outlined by Prime Minister Trudeau in his mandate letter to Health Minister Philpott included developing a new multi-year Health Accord that supports the delivery of more and better home care services, including improved access to in-home caregivers, financial supports for family care and palliative care.¹¹¹

Municipalities can also play a role in supporting an aging population by making an effort to plan for seniors' housing supports, community engagement and recreation.¹¹²

Consistent pressure must be applied to the federal, provincial and municipal governments to ensure that investment in quality seniors' care and infrastructure does not fall by the wayside.

ACTIONS

CUPE Alberta will:

- lobby the Alberta government to enact reasonable minimum standards for seniors' care, with appropriate funding and enforcement mechanisms.
- lobby Alberta's provincial and local governments to open more public long-term care and home care services for Albertans, with appropriate funding.
- continue to work with seniors' care coalitions throughout the province.

CONCLUSION

Our future together need not be mired by the oily mess we are in. To the contrary, these extraordinarily tough times bring with them opportunity. Alberta is poised to rebuild public infrastructure and services; increase our stock of social housing; capitalize on petro-alternative energy sources; decrease negative stigma around mental health issues and make it easier for people to get help; strengthen public pensions and ensure that our aging population is taken care of in a way that reflects both their value to our community

and our values as a community. We can support these aims, all while increasing CUPE's bargaining power.

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