



Canada Social Report  
Provincial/Territorial  
Policy Monitor

March 2015



CANADA SOCIAL REPORT



The [Caledon Institute of Social Policy](#) regularly scans provincial and territorial government websites in order to follow policy and program developments related to our core work and interests. A partial list includes: disability, education, health, housing, income security, poverty reduction, recreation, seniors and youth. This tracking is intended to inform our analysis of policy trends. Monitors can be searched on the Canada Social Report website by date, jurisdiction and category.

## Newfoundland and Labrador

### HEALTH

In May, children, youth and families currently waitlisted for mental health services across the province will be able to access mental health programming online and through telehealth. The new service will be offered through a partnership with the Strongest Families Institute as a complement to existing programming offered by regional health authorities. The only service of its kind in Canada, the nonprofit Strongest Families Institute's programming is being delivered in Alberta, Ontario, Nova Scotia and by the Atlantic Military Family Resource Centre. The program represents an investment of \$300,000 from the provincial government's E-Mental Health and Addictions Awareness Program.

<http://www.releases.gov.nl.ca/releases/2015/health/0323n01.aspx>

### SENIORS

Older adults will have more opportunities to engage in physical and recreational activities through a \$189,289 investment in the Provincial Government's Seniors Community Recreation Grant Program. More than \$1 million has been approved for the program since it was established in 2009.

<http://www.releases.gov.nl.ca/releases/2015/swsd/0325n02.aspx>

## New Brunswick

### BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

The province tabled its 2015-16 Budget. Authors were guided by the principle of fairness and aimed at ensuring that those with the greatest ability to pay would contribute more to address the province's fiscal situation. Social policy-related highlights include:

#### Children

- increasing the number of daycare spaces in the province by September 2018. This will start with the establishment of a daycare-spaces registry that will improve the link between the supply and demand for daycare spaces.

#### Employment

- funding for the new Youth Employment Fund to help 1,500 young people each year obtain work experience and training.

#### Education

- imposing a tuition freeze on public universities to make university more affordable and further promote a skilled workforce
- making post-secondary education more accessible and affordable by eliminating the parental and spousal contribution to student loans.
- increasing the budget for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development by 3.1 percent so that strategic investments can be made that will be guided by new, comprehensive plans for both education and literacy.



## Health

- removing the ambulance fee waiver for those who do not have private insurance coverage, and continuing to waive fees in cases of financial hardship.

## Seniors

- removing the maximum daily amount for nursing home care, from the current cap of \$113 per day (the average true cost of nursing home care is approximately \$233 per day). The province will continue to subsidize the costs of care for those who need it while ensuring that those who can afford it contribute a little more towards their care.
- continuing to exempt the family home from the assessment of a senior's ability to pay for long-term care, but no longer exempting liquid financial assets, such as savings or investments when undertaking financial assessments for nursing home residents. The Department of Social Development will be reviewing and consulting on this policy before it is introduced this fall.
- increasing the premiums for seniors who use the Medavie Blue Cross Seniors Prescription Drug Program for the first time since 2009 in order to meet its original intention of being a full cost-recovery program. This will be done in a progressive way; drugs for low-income seniors will continue to be subsidized through a separate plan.
- providing tax breaks to allow seniors or their families to renovate their homes to stay independent longer. A New Brunswick Seniors' Home Renovation Tax Credit will be introduced, effective for the 2015 taxation year.

## Women

- improving the status of women by appointing more women to positions of influence and investing more than \$400,000 to restore an independent forum to undertake research and speak on behalf of women in New Brunswick.

[http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/news/news\\_release.2015.03.0231.html](http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/news/news_release.2015.03.0231.html)

## EMPLOYMENT

Youth are invited to apply to be matched with an employer through the new Youth Employment Fund. The program will offer 1,500 unemployed youth ages 18-29 with an opportunity for a six-month placement with an employer that includes workplace experience and employment with the option of up to two months of training within the placement. Employment counsellors will match young workers with employers and training opportunities. Placements will be subsidized by the province and employers may provide a top-up. In addition, up to \$1,000 will be available for participants to cover costs associated with the job placement such as training, tools, special clothing or equipment.

[http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/news/news\\_release.2015.03.0196.html](http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/news/news_release.2015.03.0196.html)

## WOMEN

The province is enlisting the help of political parties, the private sector and non-government organizations to improve the gender balance on agencies, boards and commissions. Women's overall representation on provincial government-appointed agencies, boards and commissions has been at or near 30 percent for the last 20 years. The provincial government will also take steps to better understand the reasons for the imbalance and will take action to address systemic issues.

[http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/news/news\\_release.2015.03.0161.html](http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/news/news_release.2015.03.0161.html)

## Nova Scotia

### EDUCATION

The province announced the first steps toward supporting teacher excellence as part of the Nova Scotia Action Plan for Education. A key action in Pillar Four of the action plan, Excellence in Teaching and Leadership, is new teaching standards in Nova Scotia. Teacher education and professional development will be based on these standards. The standards will be complete in 2015-16. While this work is under way, the department will not approve any new education programs put forward by universities until new teaching standards are established.

<http://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20150303004>

### HEALTH

The government has amended the *Hospitals Act* to allow nurse practitioners to discharge patients from hospitals. The amended regulations will also allow registered nurses to assess, treat and release some patients in emergency departments and collaborative emergency centres.

<http://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20150323003>

Amendments made to the *Limitation of Actions Act* will allow victims of sexual assault and individuals in an intimate or dependent relationship to file a civil lawsuit against their abuser regardless of when the assault took place.

<http://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20150327001>

Beginning in May 2015, all 1,400 paramedics in PEI and Nova Scotia will have new tools and skills to provide palliative support that matches with the person's wishes, including the possibility of managing symptoms at home. The project has financial support from the Canadian Partnership against Cancer and Health Canada.

<http://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20150330001>

### SENIORS

Forty-four nonprofit groups promoting seniors' health, well-being and community participation will receive \$319,000 through the Positive Aging Fund Grant. Some of the projects supported include healthy living workshops, arts programs and life-long learning.

<http://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20150310001>



The government is investing \$190,000 to support a First Link program, a new service for Alzheimer patients and their families. Delivered through the province's Home First Strategy, the program connects individuals diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or dementia to health services and information in the community, from the time of diagnosis throughout the progression of the disease.

[http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/news/news\\_release.2015.03.0174.html](http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/news/news_release.2015.03.0174.html)

## Prince Edward Island

### EDUCATION

The province has updated its high school graduation requirements to ensure graduates are better prepared to transition to post-secondary education and the labour force.

<http://www.gov.pe.ca/newsroom/index.php?number=news&newsnumber=10103&dept=&lang=E>

### HEALTH

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<http://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20150330001>

### INCOME SECURITY

The province's personal comfort allowance for social assistance clients will increase from \$53 to \$71 per month beginning April 1, 2015, an investment of \$700,000. The Department of Community Services and Seniors will allocate funding from the department's 2014-15 budget to community-based organizations that currently have contracts with the province to provide programs and services.

<http://www.gov.pe.ca/newsroom/index.php?number=news&newsnumber=10140&dept=&lang=E>

## Québec

### BUDGET UPDATE

The provincial government confirmed its commitment to realizing a balanced Budget in 2015-16. Spending reductions of \$2.7 billion in 2014-15 were achieved through a 2.1 percent reduction in spending (down from the previous 10-year average of 4 percent). The government will undertake three major projects aimed at further reducing its expenditures: a program review, a review of government structures and organizations, and the imposition of wage controls.

[Link](#)

### CHILDREN

Budget 2015-16 and the adoption of Bill 28 will see funding for child care increase by \$89 million (4 percent) this fiscal year. The increase is

mainly due to the introduction of a new fund for educational child care services for children, the indexing of the parental contribution and the creation of 4,000 additional places for 2015-16. To maintain a high quality network of care, the government is consulting partners to determine effective cost-saving measures. The province will also invest:

- \$22 million over five years to support the Dr. Julien Foundation in developing a social pediatric community care network for 20,000 vulnerable children
- \$4.4 million over three years to support initiatives that counter bullying, intimidation and radicalization.

[Link](#)

### HOUSING

The Budget contains initiatives totaling \$309 million that are aimed at ensuring the safety of seniors and meeting the needs of vulnerable citizens. These include:

- establishing a financial assistance program to ensure the installation of automatic sprinklers in existing retirement homes. To be administered by the Housing Corporation of Québec, the program will allocate \$70.6 million over the next five years
- in January 2016, a new program will help seniors pay municipal taxes. At a cost of \$3 million per year, the program will assist seniors whose incomes increase at a lower rate than the municipal tax rate
- an investment of \$284 million to provide housing for low-income households and those with special needs – this includes:
  - \$126 million for the construction of 1,500 new social housing units
  - \$123 million for the Rent Supplement program (which assists 5,800 families)
  - \$33 million to adapt and renovate the homes of low-income households.

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### INCOME SECURITY

The Budget made several changes to the province's income tax measures. Social-policy related changes include:

- the gradual abolition of the health contribution. As of January 2017, 2.1 million residents will no longer pay this contribution (4.5 million by 2019, returning \$1.7 billion to taxpayers)
- the government will institute a tax shield in 2016 to protect the earnings of people who take on additional work and thereby limit the loss of tax benefits related to an increase in income. Instead, a refundable tax credit will offset any decline in premiums and the tax credit for child care expenses. This investment represents an annual tax relief totaling \$52 million to nearly 400,000 workers. For example, for a couple



with a 3-year-old child attending unsubsidized private day care whose income were to increase from \$40,000 in 2015 to \$45,000 in 2016, the tax shield would allow \$570 in tax savings.

- as of 2016, tax credits will be adjusted to encourage experienced workers to stay longer in the labour market. The maximum amount will be adjusted according to age and will reach \$10,000 in 2018 for workers ages 65 and over. A 63-year-old worker may claim a new tax benefit of up to \$902. For a 65-year-old worker, the reduction will reach \$1,504.

These three measures will allow a reduction in the tax burden that will cost \$800 million per year from 2019 to 2020.

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### INCOME SECURITY

The Québec Taxation Review Commission released Looking to the future of Québec. The Commission proposes major tax reform, including a review of tax forms for individuals. It recommends a reduction of nearly \$4.4 billion in income tax, the abolition of the health contribution, an increase in the basic personal amount and a general decrease in the income tax rate by use of a progressive scale that would leave the top marginal rate unchanged. The decrease would be financed by a reduction of tax expenditures and a new dosage form of taxation, including increased use of consumption taxes and pricing. Low-income households would be protected through a series of improved subsidy measures. The proposed reform would have a significant impact on economic growth and the provincial standard of living. It is expected to benefit middle-income earners in particular.

[Link](#)

### POVERTY REDUCTION

The province announced a one-year extension of its funding agreement with the City of Montréal. The Québec Social Initiatives Fund will grant \$9 million to support projects that tackle poverty and social exclusion. Based on identified priorities and the work already under way, several actions will continue in collaboration with partners from the City of Montréal.

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### WOMEN

The Québec Statistical Institute released a study of private sector companies with 200 more employees. It concluded that, on average, women are paid less than men. In 2013, there were approximately 81,220 regular full-time employees in professional jobs in Québec companies of 200 or more employees in the private sector; 42.1 percent were women and 57.9 percent men. Throughout the sector, the average hourly wage for professional women (\$34.36) is lower than that of men with the same skill level (\$38.55); a difference of \$4.19. In male-dominated occupations (40 percent women or less), the wage differential is \$2.55. Where there is a more even gender balance (41 to 59 percent females), the

differential is \$3.79. In professions with a higher proportion of female employees (60 percent and more), the estimated wage gap between women and men is not statistically significant.

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## Ontario

### ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

Ontario is partnering with six Aboriginal Financial Institutions to invest \$15 million over three years in eligible Aboriginal businesses, organizations and communities. Each institution will receive \$2.5 million and will use the funding to provide grants for economic capacity-building projects in Aboriginal communities, and business financing for promising community projects and Aboriginal-owned businesses.

<http://news.ontario.ca/maa/en/2015/03/aboriginal-business-and-community-fund-accepting-applications.html>

### CAREGIVING

The province is investing more than \$40 million over four years to help seniors with complex medical conditions who have experienced a recent loss of strength or mobility. The investment will enhance rehabilitative services and programs including:

- comprehensive risk assessment programs in the community
- hospital day programs and out-patient and community clinic services
- access to short-stay hospital rehabilitation programs
- supports for seniors in their home and community after a stay in hospital.

These services will help frail seniors who are at a high risk of losing their ability to live on their own as a result of an injury or prolonged hospital stay. The increased supports will help them regain the physical strength and conditioning necessary to return home and live independently.

<http://news.ontario.ca/mohltc/en/2015/03/ontario-investing-44-million-in-home-and-community-care.html>

### COMMUNITIES

The province has established a Community Hub Framework Advisory Group. A community hub can be a school, neighbourhood centre or another public space that offers coordinated services such as education, health care and social services. The advisory group will review provincial policies and develop a framework for adapting existing public assets to become community hubs.

<http://news.ontario.ca/opo/en/2015/03/premier-wynne-appoints-special-advisor-on-community-hubs.html>

### DISABILITY

Eight thousand children with physical and/or developmental disabilities are now receiving direct funding from Ontario's Special Services at Home program, which helps children learn new skills and abilities and provides



support for family caregivers. In addition, 6,000 adults are now receiving new Passport funding, a program that helps people 18 years or older with a developmental disability participate in their communities and live more independently. This \$810 million investment has also:

- provides new residential supports for 525 adults with developmental disabilities
- supports 38 new projects that will promote employment and help modernize services for people with developmental disabilities
- commits \$180 million to support low-wage, frontline workers in the developmental services sector over three years
- launches the first call for proposals to develop new housing options for adults with developmental disabilities.

<http://news.ontario.ca/mcss/en/2015/03/14000-children-and-adults-with-disabilities-receiving-support-sooner.html>

## EDUCATION

The province has committed \$22.5 billion in education funding through the 2015-16 Grants for Student Needs program. In place since 2003, the grants program offers the province's 72 school boards a means of shifting their focus from maintaining underused facilities to improving student programming and updating schools. The government has released new guidelines to help school boards review their schools, while working with municipalities and community organizations that could benefit from otherwise underused public space.

<http://news.ontario.ca/edu/en/2015/03/ontario-providing-stable-2015-16-education-funding.html>

## EMPLOYMENT

Employment increased by 13,800 in February. Ontario's youth employment (ages 15-24) rose by 3,200. With February's gains, employment in Ontario has increased by 522,500 since June 2009 – 94.5 percent of which are full-time and 67.2 percent in the private sector. Ontario's unemployment rate has declined from a recessionary high of 9.6 percent in June 2009 to 6.9 percent in February.

<http://news.ontario.ca/medt/en/2015/03/employment-in-ontario-up-13800-in-february.html>

## GOVERNANCE

Ontario is proposing reforms to the *Planning Act* and the *Development Charges Act* that would give residents a greater say in how their communities grow and offer more opportunities to fund community services like transit and recycling.

[Link](#)

## HEALTH

The provincial government released *It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment*. The plan outlines concrete steps to change attitudes, provide more supports for survivors, and make

workplaces and campuses safer and more responsive to complaints about sexual violence and harassment. The government has committed \$41 million over three years to support the plan's implementation. <http://news.ontario.ca/opo/en/2015/03/concrete-measures-to-end-sexual-violence-and-harassment.html>

The Ontario government brought together workers, employers and experts at the Summit on Work-Related Traumatic Mental Stress. More than 150 participants from policing, fire services, emergency medical services, corrections, health care, transit and social services shared their experiences and workplace best practices in dealing with traumatic mental stress.

<http://news.ontario.ca/opo/en/2015/03/concrete-measures-to-end-sexual-violence-and-harassment.html>

The government received *Bringing Care Home*, a report from the expert group on home and community care, which includes 16 recommendations to improve patient- and family-centred care. Recommendations focus on making it easier for patients and their caregivers to:

- navigate the health care system with services that are better coordinated and integrated
- understand what to expect and how to access care
- receive integrated home and community care after leaving the hospital
- access more services that support patients and their caregivers.

Building on this work, Ontario will fund interested health care organizations to develop new payment models that focus on enhancing coordination of care, as recommended by the expert group. These Integrated Funding Models will help patients transition more smoothly out of hospital into their home. For example, through this approach, a patient requiring knee replacement surgery would be assigned a care coordinator to look after all of their needs before, during and after the operation to ensure services are wrapped around the patient.

<http://www.news.ontario.ca/mohlrc/en/2015/03/ontario-endorses-expert-report-on-home-and-community-care.html>

## HOMELESSNESS

Through the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative, the province is providing \$587 million to municipalities to help families and individuals at risk of homelessness get the housing that best suits their needs. This funding will enable communities to offer a wider range of services to meet their local needs including:

- setting up emergency shelters for people in crisis
- offering homelessness prevention programs like providing emergency financial assistance to prevent eviction



- providing a mix of long-term and transitional housing
- other support services like street outreach, food banks and transportation.

<http://news.ontario.ca/mah/en/2015/03/ontario-allocates-587-million-to-help-end-homelessness.html>

### INCOME SECURITY

Ontario is raising the general minimum wage from \$11 to \$11.25 per hour, effective October 1, 2015. Minimum wage rates for jobs in special categories (e.g., liquor servers, homeworkers, students) are also increasing at the same time. The increase is the result of recent changes to the *Employment Standards Act, 2000* that tie minimum wage increases to Ontario's Consumer Price Index.

<http://news.ontario.ca/mol/en/2015/03/ontario-increasing-minimum-wage.html>

### POVERTY REDUCTION

The province released its poverty reduction strategy annual progress report. Some key indicator results reported for the period 2008-14 include:

- 1) Birth weights – increase shown from 80 percent to 80.7 percent [measure not explained].
- 2) School readiness (Early Development Instrument) – The percentage of children with the skills and competencies that make them ready for school has increased from 71.5 percent to 72.4 percent.
- 3) Educational progress (Grades 3 and 6 testing) – percentage of children in Grades 3 and 6 that met or exceeded the provincial standards of literacy and numeracy has increased from 67 percent to 72 percent.
- 4) High school graduation rates – The percentage of students who have graduated from high school has increased from 79 percent to 83 percent.
- 5) Low Income Measure (LIM 50) – the province reported a positive impact on reducing child poverty, as measured by the Low Income Measure (LIM 50). The child poverty rate fell from 15.2 percent in 2008 to 13.6 percent in 2011 – helping lift 47,000 children and their families out of poverty and preventing 61,000 children and their families from falling into poverty.
- 6) Depth of Poverty (LIM 40) – progress in reducing the number of children in deep poverty, from 8.5 per cent in 2008 to 7.7 percent in 2011, as measured by the Depth of Poverty (LIM 40) indicator.
- 7) Ontario Housing Measure – a decrease from 5.4 to 5.1 percent [measure not explained]
- 8) Standard of Living [note: Changes at Statistics Canada eliminated the survey that carried the Ontario Deprivation Index, making data on the existing Standard of Living indicator inconsistent and likely unavailable in the future].

Three new indicators will be developed to track the strategy's impact over time:

- 1) Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) – tracking the percentage of youth and young adults (ages 15 to 29) who are not in education, employment or training.
- 2) Long-Term Unemployment – tracking the percentage of working-age Ontarians (ages 25 to 64) who are unemployed for more than six months.
- 3) Poverty Rates of Vulnerable Populations – tracking the poverty rates of Aboriginal Peoples living off reserve, newcomers, persons with disabilities, unattached individuals ages 45 to 64 and female lone parents.

In addition, an Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness is developing a definition and establishing a target to measure homelessness.

<http://www.ontario.ca/home-and-community/realizing-our-potential-ontarios-poverty-reduction-strategy-2014-2019>

Ontario is removing the Debt Retirement Charge for all residential consumers and introducing the Ontario Electricity Support Program for low-income families. The proposed program, administered through the Ontario Energy Board, would come into effect on January 1, 2016, and would help low-income Ontarians by providing them with financial assistance. Qualifying individuals could be eligible for a \$20 to \$50 monthly credit based on the size of the household and income. For example, a family of four with an annual income of less than \$28,000 would be eligible for a \$38 monthly credit -- a total of about \$455 per year.

<http://news.ontario.ca/mei/en/2015/03/ontario-to-remove-debt-retirement-charge-and-launch-low-income-electricity-support-program.html>

### TRANSPORTATION

Ontario is proposing reforms to the *Planning Act* and the *Development Charges Act* that would give residents a greater say in how their communities grow and would provide more opportunities to fund community services like transit and recycling.

<http://news.ontario.ca/mah/en/2015/03/ontario-introducing-new-rules-for-community-smart-growth.html>

Ontario has a new pilot grant program to improve community transportation services for seniors, persons living with disabilities, youth and other members of the community who need transportation. Eleven municipalities have been selected to receive up to \$100,000 to improve transportation services through the sharing and coordination of community transportation resources. The Community Transportation Pilot Grant Program will deliver funds to municipalities to partner with community organizations, such as health and community agencies, transit agencies, school bus operators and private transit operators, to coordinate local transportation services.

<http://news.ontario.ca/mto/en/2015/03/improving-transportation-for-youth-seniors-persons-living-with-disabilities.html>



## Manitoba

### CHILDREN

The province is preparing to launch a commission that will redesign the province's early learning and child care system, and to create more universally accessible care for Manitoba families that need it.

<http://news.gov.mb.ca/news/index.html?item=34411&post-ed=2015-03-19>

### COMMUNITY

The Manitoba government is expanding its program to reduce red tape for non-profit organizations and to provide stable funding for those that are not currently involved in the program. This initiative was originally announced in 2011 as a pilot project to provide stable, predictable funding to 35 representative non-profit organizations along with additional goals of:

- eliminating administrative duplication
- streamlining reporting requirements
- developing a more accountable, efficient and responsive relationship between government and the non-profit sector.

<http://news.gov.mb.ca/news/index.html?item=34413&post-ed=2015-03-19>

### FOOD SECURITY

The Manitoba government is making a \$300,000 investment in a local food social enterprise operating in Garden Hill First Nation.

<http://news.gov.mb.ca/news/index.html?item=34396&post-ed=2015-03-18>

## Saskatchewan

### BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

Social policy-related Budget highlights include:

#### Aboriginal Peoples

- \$5.1 million in ongoing funding for initiatives that respond to the Joint Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People (Ministry of Education);
- \$30.8 million (an increase of \$1.0 million) in funding targeted at Adult Basic Education and Provincial Training Allowance programs (Ministry of the Economy)

#### Children

The province is allocating \$7.7 million to help at-risk children, youth and families, including:

- \$3.0 million for foster care and extended family care
- \$2.0 million for medically fragile children with complex needs
- \$1.3 million for Assisted Adoption

- \$1.0 million in preventative services to keep children from coming into the care of the ministry
- \$400,000 for youth transitions from private treatment.

Work will continue with First Nation and Métis partners on Child Welfare Transformation, part of the Saskatchewan Child and Family Agenda, to renew the child welfare system and focus on keeping children safely at home through prevention.

<http://finance.gov.sk.ca/budget2015-16/NR-SocialServices-Main.pdf>

#### Disability

The province is increasing benefits to the Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability program for the fourth consecutive year with an additional \$5.7 million. In June 2015, those in residential care will receive an increase of \$20 a month; individuals and couples will see increases of \$50 and \$55 respectively. Approximately 13,000 households will benefit. The province will also spend \$6.1 million to enable community-based organizations to provide residential spaces and programs for people with intellectual disabilities. Two million dollars is available to support the completion of one "safety net" home in Moose Jaw to provide assessment, stabilization and crisis response services, and the development of a second home in southern Saskatchewan. This investment will support those currently living in the community as well as individuals moving from Valley View Centre.

<http://finance.gov.sk.ca/budget2015-16/NR-SocialServices-Main.pdf>

#### Education

The province is increasing its overall investment in education by 14 percent over 2014-15 to a total of \$2.0 billion. In addition to setting a capital education budget of \$248.4 million, the province will allocate:

- \$4.6 million for Supports for Learning for school divisions to continue funding announced in the fall of 2014
- \$420,000 in funding for additional English as an Additional Language supports to deliver on commitments made to school divisions in the 2014-15 school year
- \$75,000 in additional funding to develop Braille and alternate format materials for students with disabilities
- \$6.0 million in continued funding (of which \$925,000 will be invested through the Ministries of Advanced Education and Economy), to support government's continued response to the recommendations from the Joint Task Force on Improving First Nations and Métis Education and Employment Outcomes in Saskatchewan.

<http://finance.gov.sk.ca/budget2015-16/NR-Education.pdf>



## Health

In addition to the investments in seniors' health, the province will spend:

- \$3.31 billion for Regional Health Authorities – an increase of \$55.7 million from last year – for operating funding and targeted initiatives
- \$157.3 million for the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency, a rise of \$1.58 million
- \$127.4 million capital investment – an increase of \$32.5 million from 2014-15
- \$3.0 million to advance work to reduce emergency department wait times and improve patient flow
- \$550,000 in annualized funds to make the Little Tots Autism Spectrum Disorder program in Saskatoon permanent
- \$20.2 million in direct support for First Nations and Métis post-secondary education.

The Budget will make an adjustment in order that, effective July 1, 2015, the income threshold for the Saskatchewan Seniors' Drug Plan will decrease from the federal age credit (2013 tax year - \$80,255) to the provincial age credit (2013 tax year - \$65,515). Of the 137,500 seniors who are eligible for coverage, approximately 6,000 seniors will be impacted. Seniors who are no longer eligible for the program may qualify for coverage under the Special Support Program if their drug costs are high relative to their income.

<http://finance.gov.sk.ca/budget2015-16/HealthBudgetBackgrounder.pdf>

## Seniors

The 2015-16 Ministry of Health Budget provides an additional \$10 million investment into new targeted funding to support seniors living in their own homes as well as improving the quality of long-term care. Highlights include:

- \$3.5 million to support seniors who wish to remain at home as long as possible by enhancing the Home First/Quick Response Program in three health regions and expanding the program in the Prairie North Health Region to an additional site. This brings the total funding for Home First/Quick Response to \$8.0 million.
- \$2.8 million in capital renovations in Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region and Saskatoon Health Region to develop specialized units for individuals with dementia or challenging behaviours.
- \$2.0 million in individualized funding that provides increased choice and flexibility for home care clients to choose their care provider, delivering more services and eliminating the current wait list for funding in four health regions.
- \$1.0 million annually to support Purposeful Rounding, the practice of seeing to the needs of long-term care residents within a prescribed amount of time, improving resident safety and satisfaction while ensuring better clinical outcomes.

- \$700,000 to develop a new Geriatric Program in the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region, including the recruitment of a geriatrician to Regina, to provide a range of services to seniors, including support for quality in long-term care.

[Link](#)

## EMPLOYMENT

Statistics Canada data showed that Saskatchewan recorded the lowest unemployment rate in Canada for the month of February 2015. The seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate was 5.0 percent, compared to a national rate of 6.8 percent.

<http://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2015/march/13/labour-stats>

## HEALTH

Combined purchasing power resulted in \$98 million in cumulative health care savings. Joint contracting allows 3sHealth (Health Shared Services Saskatchewan) to contract to purchase services and products in bulk on behalf of health regions and the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency. This process has reduced the cost of medical surgical supplies, drugs and services like telecommunications and liability insurance while improving or maintaining quality and safety for patients, families and staff.

<http://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2015/march/24/new-savings-in-healthcare>

## Alberta

### ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

The new Alberta Aboriginal Construction Career Centres pilot will complement other existing programs that support Aboriginal training and employment in trades careers. This two-year pilot program is co-sponsored by the Alberta government, Bow Valley College, NorQuest College, industry and Aboriginal organizations. It will help more than 600 Aboriginal people train for careers in the construction industry.

<http://alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=378729589AFA9-A508-441F-6BF-6C1E9E4539D00>

Multiple initiatives are being implemented to improve the educational outcomes and economic prosperity of Aboriginal women. These actions are based on recommendations from the First Nations and Métis women's councils on economic security. The councils were set up in 2013 to provide advice to government on improving the quality of life of Aboriginal women. Both councils have submitted their first reports and the Alberta government has accepted all of the recommendations. Each council has a five-year mandate and members will begin working on their next set of priority recommendations for 2015.

<http://alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=37940366A558A-FA03-D2D7-DD664266746FD6D7>



## BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

Guided by 10 Fiscal Principles and a matching 10-year vision, Budget 2015 includes five-year fiscal and capital plans showing Albertans the long-term approach government is taking. Funding for primary education and vulnerable Albertans will be increased while internal adjustments will keep overall expenses lower than the 2014-15 forecast. Working families will benefit from an enhancement to the Alberta Family Employment Tax Credit and the introduction of the Alberta Working Family Supplement for lower-income families.

<http://alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=379486D767B80-E6B6-D13B-D2D8C1E809442C2F>

## ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

The government will:

- maintain funding for Alberta Native Friendship Centres
- allocate \$42 million for First Nations and Metis economic and social development
- supply \$15.8 million for the Aboriginal Consultation Office
- supply \$128 million to the First Nations Development Fund (from government-owned slot machines in First Nations casinos), down \$10 million due to lower proceeds.

<http://alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=37955711DC590-A187-4E7C-86EC7704936AD060>

## EDUCATION

Funding to school boards in Budget 2015 will honour the last year of the current collective agreement with teachers. The commitment to protect classroom teachers will foster long-term success. In addition, approximately \$10 million from the Alberta Education department budget will be reallocated to school boards, to help mitigate funding pressures in other areas. Fifty million dollars from the Access to the Future Fund will help Campus Alberta move towards a more sustainable model that delivers excellence and accessibility. Enhancements to student aid programming will ensure Albertans can access educational opportunities.

<http://alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=37952703E05C2-F74E-1FBE-89B9F-CFFDE263995>

## FAMILIES

New Parent Link Centres in Edmonton City Centre, Innisfail and Sylvan Lake will offer parents and caregivers free resources and support to develop nurturing environments, which play a key role in early childhood development. The program furthers the province's work in early intervention and prevention.

<http://alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=37960952F60F1-9265-A4A6-B8BA5A4F66862203>

## INCOME SECURITY

Income supports through the Alberta Seniors Benefit, Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped, child care subsidies for low-income families and other programs are unchanged. A new low-interest loan program will help more seniors stay in their homes.

<http://alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=3795470E-9C04A-D476-C975-274D3B2F9D96C3FE>

## POVERTY REDUCTION

Seniors and low-income families and individuals in need will continue to have access to safe housing and shelter, and income support. Human Services is maintaining front-line services and staff for vulnerable Albertans. For seniors, a new low-interest Home Repair Loan Program will be introduced that is flexible and more accessible to cover the costs of home repairs and modifications.

<http://alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=3795470E-9C04A-D476-C975-274D3B2F9D96C3FE>

An Alberta Poverty Reduction Action Plan is being developed to work in concert with programs and initiatives to support a complementary, balanced and aligned social serving system for low-income working families. Where budget reductions are unavoidable, the common approach across ministries is to be more innovative and streamlined to manage costs and pressures.

Beginning July 1, 2016, two measures will return an estimated \$110 million to working families and support the forthcoming Alberta Poverty Reduction Action Plan:

- the enhanced Alberta Family Employment Tax Credit will provide an additional \$25 million to working families. An 11 percent phase-in threshold on working income over \$2,760, up from eight percent; a higher phase-out threshold, \$41,250 up from \$36,778.
- a new Alberta Working Family Supplement refundable tax credit on earnings up to \$41,220; providing an estimated \$85 million in support for about 75,000 working families.

<http://alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=37955711DC590-A187-4E7C-86EC7704936AD060>

## HEALTH

Over the next two years, the province will spend \$50 million to expand the role of paramedics, renovate emergency rooms in Calgary and Edmonton and open 311 "restorative care" spaces. These spaces – 186 in Calgary and 125 in Edmonton – are designed to help seniors maintain and improve function after a stay in hospital and help more seniors return home.

<http://alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=3783060FB5F08-F8FE-42FB-EC462F7481894525>



The province passed legislation to allow gay-straight alliances to be established in schools.

<http://alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=3782536C-9BA48-C8B1-616F-87F00CBAE66A2D6B>

Following consultations with more than 100 communities, action is being taken to improve access to health-care services in rural Alberta. The Rural Health Services Review Committee has delivered its final report and recommended actions – a number of which are underway, including: i) developing a provincial Emergency Medical Services delivery model, and ii) establishing eight to 10 Alberta Health Services (AHS) operational districts to give communities a stronger voice in local decision-making. Government and AHS will continue to work to address other issues noted in the report, such as the importance of primary health care, team-based care and supporting caregivers.

The new AHS operational districts, to be implemented by July 1, will be responsible for delivering local health services and meeting performance objectives. They will receive advice from new 10-15 member Local Advisory Committees.

<http://alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=37883C-5BA8FE0-EA79-D893-B8A2F0F535B9A063>

## SENIORS

Affordable Supportive Living Initiative (ASLI) grants will help build up to 2,612 supportive living spaces, higher than the original projections of 1,500. Of the more than 2,600 new spaces, close to 400 will be allocated for long-term care. Also included are the 311 restorative care spaces for Edmonton and Calgary. Government will direct \$180 million toward 31 projects in 18 communities. ASLI grants cover up to 50 per cent of the capital cost for the new spaces. Grant recipients are required to maintain the units at government-established rates for 30 years.

<http://alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=378379179B849-E4CD-677A-F8DA58138F17C4DB>

## British Columbia

### CHILDREN

Families in 14 communities will soon benefit from new BC Early Years Centres, which provide one-stop early learning, health and family services to families with young children. The sites were chosen by a cross-ministry selection panel and are located in a diverse mix of urban, rural and Aboriginal communities. Each centre will receive \$52,000 from the Provincial Office for the Early Years for this fiscal year as part of a \$5.5-million investment over three years. The 14 new centres are in addition to the 12 test sites that opened in Fall 2012.

<http://www.newsroom.gov.bc.ca/2015/03/new-early-years-centres-coming-to-bc-communities.html>

## EDUCATION

Bill 11, the *Education Statutes Amendment Act (2015)* will help school districts reduce overhead costs, establish a modern framework for teacher professional development and put a stronger focus on accountability for student outcomes. Proposed amendments to the *School Act*, the *In-dependent School Act* and the *Teachers Act* are focused on four objectives:

- building a framework for continuing professional development
- facilitating delivery of shared services among school districts
- improving the accountability framework for student learning
- aligning the provisions on the disclosure of student data with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

<http://www.newsroom.gov.bc.ca/2015/03/bill-11-to-strengthen-k-12-accountability-efficiency-and-professional-development.html>

## HOUSING

An enhanced licensing system for residential builders in BC will lead to higher professional standards in the residential construction sector and help protect new homebuyers. Under the Homeowner Protection Act regulations, the BC government is establishing new qualifications and continuing education requirements for home builders constructing single-family homes and small residential buildings.

<http://www.newsroom.gov.bc.ca/2015/03/enhanced-builder-licensing-helps-protect-homebuyers.html>

## INCOME SECURITY

Effective September 1, 2015, the province is doubling the income exemption for families with children who receive income assistance from \$200 to \$400 a month, and increasing it from \$300 to \$500 a month for families that have a child with a disability.

These changes will not affect income assistance rates and the affected families will also be able to keep their basic health supplement coverage for a full year when they leave income assistance for employment. Health supplements give families access to dental, optical and Ministry of Health Medical Services Plan and Pharmacare programs. Previously, the government had announced:

- in 2012, earnings exemptions for people on disability assistance increased from \$500 to \$800 a month. In January 2015, BC became the first province in Canada to annualize those earnings exemptions up to \$9,600 a year. This means that a single person on disability income can keep more of the money they earned by calculating it annually instead of on a monthly basis.
- in Budget 2015, the province made child support payments fully exempt for families receiving income and disability assistance. This



change that will provide an additional \$32 million over the next three years for 3,200 families and 5,400 children.

More than 10,600 families on income assistance are expected to benefit from the new earnings exemptions.

<http://www.newsroom.gov.bc.ca/2015/03/more-help-for-families-with-children-on-assistance.html>

From 2016, the provincial minimum wage will be determined using a formula calculated on the percentage the BC Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased in the previous calendar year. In years in which there is a negative CPI change, the minimum wage would stay the same. The indexing formula is being applied to the period since the last minimum wage increase in 2012. Effective Sept 15, 2015, the general minimum hourly wage will increase from \$10.25 to \$10.45 and the liquor server wage from \$9.00 to \$9.20 per hour.

<http://www.newsroom.gov.bc.ca/2015/03/bc-indexes-minimum-wage-to-provincial-cpi.html>

#### TRANSPORTATION

The province announced BC on the Move, a ten-year, \$2.6 billion transportation plan that will grow the economy, improve safety, maintain and replace aging infrastructure and support trade. Highlights include:

- partnering with First Nations on projects that support economic activity
- improving accessibility for persons with limited mobility by upgrading rest areas.
- new investments in bike lanes and trails through partnerships with local communities.

<http://www.newsroom.gov.bc.ca/2015/03/bc-launches-10-year-transportation-plan.html>

## Yukon Territory

### WOMEN

The Government of Yukon is providing \$281,000 in funding over three years, subject to legislative approval, for a pilot legal advocate position to meet the needs of women navigating the legal system.

[http://www.gov.yk.ca/news/15-102.html#.VRbK6fnF\\_el](http://www.gov.yk.ca/news/15-102.html#.VRbK6fnF_el)

## Northwest Territories

### EDUCATION

The government announced that all K-12 teachers in the Territory have been trained on the history and legacy of residential schools.

<http://news.exec.gov.nt.ca/jackson-lafferty-success-of-the-nwts-residential-schools-curriculum-resource/>

### INCOME SECURITY

Starting in April 2015, Income Assistance clients will receive more money for food and incidental expenses. These benefits will continue to increase each year for the next four years.

<http://news.exec.gov.nt.ca/jackson-lafferty-improving-the-income-security-program/>

## Nunavut

*No updates this month.*