

Policing and Rural Crime

Regardless of where in the province they live, all Albertans deserve to feel safe in their homes and communities. Like many services, policing in rural areas is accompanied by challenges related to large geographic areas and low population densities. Rural municipalities have a history of working effectively with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to support community safety, but challenges related to response time, police funding, and collaboration between police and municipal leaders is ongoing.

What is RMA's position on the importance of policing and rural crime in rural municipalities?

- Safe communities are critical to attracting and retaining residents and businesses. In rural areas this is especially critical as many properties are located in isolated areas far from neighbours or services, leaving them especially vulnerable to property crimes.
- In recent years, rural crime rates in rural Alberta have increased significantly. For example, in 2017, rural crime rates in rural Alberta were 38% higher than in urban Alberta. In many rural areas, residents and businesses perceive crime as a crisis that significantly impacts their quality of life.
- Due to the unique challenges of policing rural Alberta, supporting safe rural communities requires collaboration among many groups, including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Alberta Justice, municipalities, and local non-profit organizations.

What financial considerations do rural municipalities have with respect to policing and rural crime?

- As is the case with most services, providing a comparable level of policing service in rural areas to that in urban areas would cost significantly more and is likely impractical due to rural Alberta's large geographic areas and dispersed population.
- Under Alberta's police funding model, frontline policing in rural municipalities is jointly funded by the provincial and federal governments through the Provincial Police Services Agreement. Rural municipalities make direct financial contributions to policing in areas such as community peace officers, enhanced policing positions, administrative costs, and capital costs.
- Policing costs vary widely among municipalities of all types in Alberta. While different types and sizes of municipalities are required to contribute a different portion of frontline policing costs, council decisions on enhanced policing, grants

available to only some municipalities, and other factors result in significant variability in the actual per capita costs of policing across the province.

- Although rural crime is often directly linked to policing, investments in other community services such as recreation, restorative justice and Family and Community Support Services have a link to crime rates and community safety. It is critical that the provincial and federal government adequately support rural community services as a means of proactively addressing crime.

What collaborative relationships are essential to developing safe rural communities?

- Effective outreach and engagement with the community is a critical aspect of effective, modern policing. Due to limited police capacity and fewer formal community organizations in comparison to urban communities, prioritizing outreach and engagement can be a challenge for rural police services.
- Rural municipalities currently have the option of forming police committees to collaborate with the local RCMP detachment on policing priorities and strategies. However, police committees are voluntary, and are used inconsistently across the province.
- To support community safety and strengthen collaboration between police and communities, the Government of Alberta should consider approaches to better leverage police committees in communities where a lack of capacity or training may be a barrier to their formation.

How does the work of RMA support safe rural communities?

- RMA champions the rural municipal perspective on policing and crime through regular communication with a variety of crime-related organizations (e.g. Alberta Justice, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Alberta Association of Community Peace Officers).

What current policing and rural crime-related issues are impacting rural Alberta?

Police Act Review

- Alberta's *Police Act* guides the structure of policing in Alberta, including funding, governance, and oversight.
- Any changes to the *Police Act* must be considered through a rural lens, as changes to community engagement, levels of service, and funding models are likely to have very different impacts in rural and urban areas.



POSITION STATEMENT

Community Peace Officers

- Community peace officers play an important role in many rural municipalities by enforcing municipal bylaws and some provincial laws.
- As community peace officers may encounter dangerous or unpredictable situations, it is critical that they have adequate training and resources to support a safe work environment.
- Community peace officers likely to encounter dangerous or unpredictable situations require direct and timely access to the Canadian Police Information Centre in order to gather basic information before approaching an unknown person or vehicle.

Rural Crime Action Plan

- The Government of Alberta's Rural Crime Action Plan is an important step toward developing a coordinated, multi-jurisdictional approach to reducing rural crime.
- The Government of Alberta's Rural Crime Action Plan has contributed to addressing rural property crime, with an 11% reduction seen in the Plan's first year. This coordinated provincial focus on addressing rural crime must continue and include all aspects of the justice system, including policing and prosecution.

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