

- 1-24F** **Attraction and Retention Strategy for Rural Health Care Professionals** *(County of Stettler)*
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Resolution 1-24F

Attraction and Retention Strategy for Rural Health Care Professionals

County of Stettler

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Health, Alberta Seniors, Community and Social Services, Alberta Mental Health and Addiction, Alberta Advanced Education

WHEREAS adequate medical services and the professionals required to deliver those services are critical to the safety and well-being of all Albertans; and

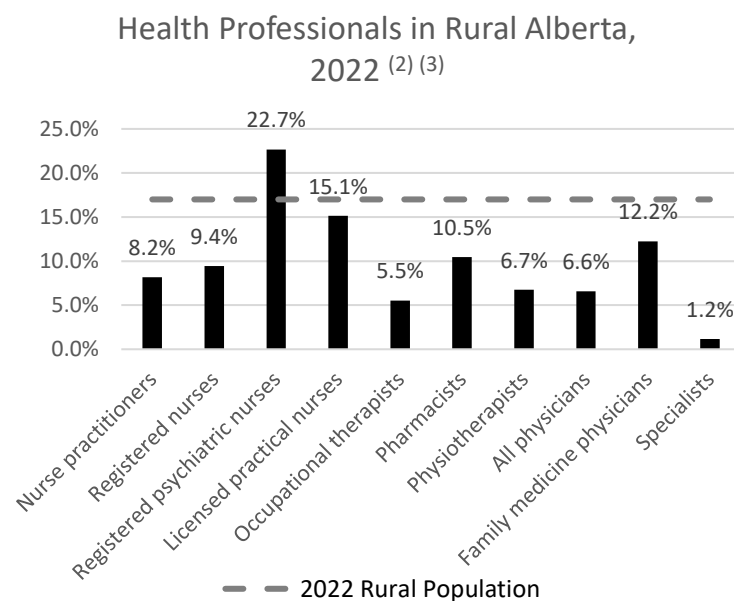
WHEREAS Albertans living in rural and remote areas face the largest impact from shortages of health care workers; and

WHEREAS a robust and diverse workforce of health care professionals is needed in Alberta to provide equitable access to appropriate health care services no matter where Albertans live; and

WHEREAS a cohesive provincial strategy focusing on increasing the number of health care professionals in rural Alberta is critical to ensuring stability and equity in Alberta’s health care system; and

WHEREAS health providers across most professional groups are overrepresented in urban areas compared to the proportion of Albertans living in rural areas;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate for the Government of Alberta to urgently prioritize a commitment to long-term sustainable funding to accelerate implementation of the Rural Health Action Plan 2024-2027 and the work of the Rural Health Professions Action Plan that focuses on increasing the total number of health care professionals in rural and remote Alberta.



Member Background

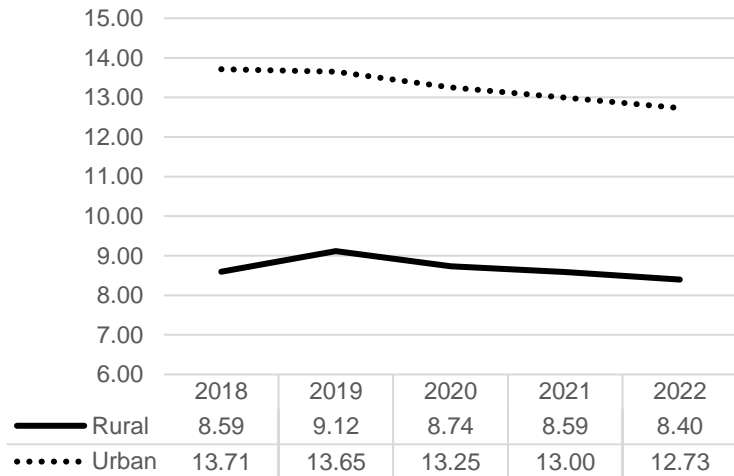
The lack of health care professionals affects all communities in Alberta but is more acute outside of the major urban centres. Per this graph, nearly all health care professions are underrepresented in rural Alberta, leading to staff burnout, dissatisfaction, and premature retirement as well as relocation to better staffed communities.

In response to the shortage of health care professionals, community-driven attraction and retention initiatives are becoming increasingly common in rural Alberta. Leaders at the municipal, business, and community level recognize

that health care services are crucial for community sustainability and where health services are not available, growth is unlikely and out-migration of taxpayers, investors, workers, and service providers is inevitable. To avoid a continuously dwindling economy, municipalities are forced to act; and this represents another case of downloading of provincial responsibility onto municipalities left with little choice but to undertake property tax-funded initiatives to try and avoid consequential health care staff shortages and resulting reduction in medical services in their community.

Despite all recruitment efforts, there were still 270 medical service disruption notices issued by Alberta Health Services in 2023 across 43 communities. This is empirical evidence that even where health facilities are established, the staff required to operate them are lacking and the facilities cannot serve Albertans. Local efforts to attract and retain service providers may address immediate community concerns, if successful, but fall short in tackling the broader challenge of addressing the overall scarcity of frontline professionals in a complex and interconnected industry.

Family Physicians per 10,000 population ⁽²⁾ ⁽³⁾



Current demographic trends in Alberta will place additional stress on our health care system in our lifetimes unless deliberate action is taken;

1. Alberta leads Canada with a 4.41% year-over-year population growth rate (Q2 2023 – Q2 2024) and is expected to reach 7.1 million people by 2051.
2. By 2051, Alberta’s population is expected to reach an average age of 41.6 years, up from the current average of 39.0 years of age.
3. Life expectancy is anticipated to increase by 4.7 years for females and 6.2 years for males by 2051.
4. The ‘baby boom cohort’ (people born between 1946 and 1965) will significantly impact the aging rate. By 2031, the number of Albertans aged 65 years and older is expected to make up a larger share of the population than the number of children aged 0 to 14.
5. The over-65 age demographic represents approximately 15% of the population and is expected to increase to 20% by 2051.

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RMA Background

17-22F: Government Funding For Nurse Practitioners

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request the Government of Alberta to establish a salary-based funding model that will fairly and equitably compensate nurse practitioners for work in rural local care facilities and rural independent clinics.

[Click here](#) to view the full resolution.

Resolution 2-24F

Increased Funding Support for Rural Family and Community Support Services Programs

Vulcan County and Wheatland County

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Seniors, Community and Social Services, Alberta Health Services, Children and Family Services

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta (GOA) identifies proactive and preventive approaches to social issues as being key to building and sustaining a system that improves outcomes for children, families, seniors and communities; and

WHEREAS Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) is a partnership between the GOA, municipalities and Métis Settlements that develop locally driven, preventative social initiatives that enhance the wellbeing of individuals, families and communities; and

WHEREAS FCSS is established pursuant to the *Family and Community Support Services Act* and the Family and Community Support Services Regulation, in which the Government of Alberta contributes 80% of program costs and municipalities contribute at least 20% of the program cost; and

WHEREAS there are 210 local FCSS programs representing 316 municipalities participating in the provincial FCSS program; and

WHEREAS FCSS services include programs for parent and family support, early childhood development, youth programs, and programs to keep seniors connected to the community; and

WHEREAS the seniors demographic is growing in Alberta and around the world and the cost of institutional health care and housing for this vulnerable population has been proven to be unsustainable; and

WHEREAS investments in proactive and preventative actions lead to less pressure on crisis management and intervention services related to justice, health care, child intervention, family violence, and seniors' institutional housing, which will ultimately reduce the economic and social costs to the GOA and all Albertans; and

WHEREAS in 2010 and 2014, RMA endorsed resolutions calling for the GOA to increase FCSS funding as it had remained stagnant for years; and

WHEREAS in 2015, the GOA responded by increasing FCSS funding by 33% from \$76 million to \$101 million, however, has not increased FCSS funding by more than 5% in the last nine years since then; and

WHEREAS In 2023, RMA recognized the challenge posed by rural FCSS programs and enlisted the University of Alberta's Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities (ACSRC) to develop a report that specifically outlines the issues faced in local rural FCSS programs; and

WHEREAS the ACSRC report noted key challenges facing rural programming including insufficient provincial funding, increasing inaccessibility of provincial social services in rural Alberta, and changing and increasing social needs in rural Alberta; and

WHEREAS the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with a period of high inflation has left more Albertans in need of social services provided by FCSS programs; and

WHEREAS rural FCSS programs are faced with an increased challenge of providing preventative services that meet local needs, with limited funding and reduced access to provincial support services;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) advocate to the Government of Alberta (GOA) to immediately begin indexing provincial Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) funding to population growth and inflation;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the RMA advocate that the GOA improve accessibility to provincial supports for vulnerable rural residents to allow for fair and equitable access to critical services throughout Alberta that adequately meet their needs.

Member Background

The Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) philosophy is based on a belief that self-help contributes to a sense of integrity, self-worth and independence. The programs developed are intended to help individuals in the community to adopt healthy lifestyles thereby improving the quality of life and building the capacity to prevent and or deal with crisis situations should the need arise.

In particular, FCSS offers specific solutions to the critical need for increased supports to our seniors population that facilitate aging in place. The cost of institutional health care and housing for this segment of the population has been demonstrated to be unsustainable, given the increased numbers of seniors and of health care needs. If FCSS funding were increased to offset population growth and inflation, the high cost of health care and housing for seniors could be mitigated by allowing those who want to age in place to do so with greater supports through FCSS.

The last substantial increase of provincial funding to FCSS Programs was in 2015; almost 10 years of stagnant funding that has been unresponsive to enormous economic and social challenges and has placed hardship on FCSS programs across Alberta. Because of this, FCSS organizations are falling further behind in their ability to maintain their level of support to Albertans, and in many cases, much needed services and programs will be reduced or eliminated in municipalities. Stagnant funding erodes the effectiveness of FCSS programming because of the increased population accessing services, as well as the increased cost to provide the same services year over year.

Municipalities are legislatively tasked with establishing and delivering preventative social services and programs that meet the needs of their residents through FCSS Programs. In particular, rural FCSS directors and staff deal closely with community members and have a firsthand view of the local needs, which increases their ability to respond. As needs grow, the cost of providing adequate services has increased at a rate that far exceeds the level of funding provided by the Government of Alberta. Municipalities are, therefore, tasked with filling in the funding gaps. When this occurs over multiple years and across the entire province, it solidifies that there is a critical need to examine the level of government funding.

Coupled with the strain of frozen funding, provincial support services are becoming harder to access for rural residents. Provincial support services are being reduced, consolidated, and moved online which poses accessibility challenges for vulnerable rural Albertans. As this occurs, the services are downloaded to rural FCSS programs.

The University of Alberta’s Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities (ACSRC) Report on FCSS Service Delivery Challenges in Rural Alberta captures the unique challenge to smaller, rural FCSS programs. Throughout the study, there was repeated feedback that the consistent downloading of tasks by the province is further stressing FCSS programs across rural communities by increasing their workload without access to additional government funding.

Additional Information:

University of Alberta’s Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities (ACSRC) Report on FCSS Service Delivery Challenges in Rural Alberta:

<https://rmaalberta.com/reports-toolkits/fcss-service-delivery-challenges-in-rural-alberta/>

Government of Alberta – Alberta Supports:

<https://www.alberta.ca/alberta-supports>

RMA Background

RMA has no active resolutions directly related to this issue.

Resolution 3-24F

Collection of Unpaid Municipal Property Taxes by Way of Royalties

MD of Taber

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Municipal Affairs, Alberta Energy and Minerals, Alberta Energy Regulator

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta manages 81% of the province's mineral rights and resources on behalf of Albertans; and

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta sets conditions and the royalty framework for resource development, specifically, producing oil and/or gas wells and oil sand projects; and

WHEREAS rural municipalities provide delivery of essential services to industry, including the oil and gas industry, on behalf of the Government of Alberta; and

WHEREAS rural municipalities and the Government of Alberta have a rich tradition of positive partnership in solving problems for the benefit of Alberta residents and stakeholders; and

WHEREAS Alberta municipalities fall within the jurisdiction of the Government of Alberta including in the form of support in their role and mandate in delivering essential local services on their behalf;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) advocate that the Government of Alberta (GOA) require oil and gas developers and operators to pay municipal property taxes on oil and gas properties as a condition of being granted and/or retaining the right to develop oil and natural gas resources;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that RMA advocate to the GOA to collect unpaid oil and gas municipal property taxes on behalf of municipalities through the collection of royalty revenue and distribute them accordingly.

Member Background

Rural municipalities in Alberta rely on property tax revenue to fund the construction and maintenance of essential infrastructure, as well as the provision of essential municipal services. The majority of Alberta's oil and gas exploration activities take place in the province's rural municipalities. Oil and gas companies make use of rural municipal infrastructure, including roads and bridges, to reach well sites, pipelines, and privately owned infrastructure to extract these resources.

The Municipal Government Act grants municipalities the authority to impose property taxes on oil and gas assets situated within their municipal jurisdictions, including the ability to seize and sell delinquent properties.² Due to gaps in provincial legislation and regulations, municipalities have been unable to apply many of these powers to recover unpaid taxes on oil and gas properties. The absence of effective enforcement mechanisms has led to some oil and gas companies disregarding their legal obligation to pay property taxes, often without consequence.

In 2021, the Alberta government updated the Municipal Government Act to provide greater clarity on the authority of municipalities to impose special liens on oil and gas properties to recover outstanding

tax arrears, thereby enhancing their ability to address delinquent tax payments and uphold the tax obligations of the industry. However, this strategy does not address businesses who have no plans to expand, giving them the ability to keep operating while ignoring their tax responsibilities. Additionally, in 2021, the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) updated Directive 067 to emphasize that the AER will consider the payment of property taxes as a factor when evaluating applications for oil and gas licenses, thereby integrating tax compliance into the licensing process and emphasizing the importance of responsible tax stewardship within the industry. Neither change has resulted in a meaningful solution to this issue, as the amount of unpaid taxes continues to grow, even amidst favourable market conditions.

The accumulation of unpaid property taxes in rural municipalities has far-reaching consequences, including diminished service levels, burdensome tax hikes on other property owners, negative impact on local business communities that provide services to the oil and gas industry, and strained regional cooperation. The failure to pay property taxes by some property owners affects the entire community, ultimately resulting in either higher tax rates or reduced municipal services for all taxpayers, as uncollected property tax revenue is made up through increased burdens on others.

The Alberta Government conceivably should have the ability to collect unpaid municipal property taxes by leveraging its existing framework for collecting resource royalties. By integrating unpaid municipal tax collection – specifically with respect to the bad actors within the oil and gas resource sector – into the royalty payment system, the province could require resource developers to remit royalties and outstanding municipal property taxes directly to the Government. This approach could involve the establishment and/or outlining of legislative and/or systems-based changes where oil and gas resource operators, as part of their royalty agreements, must include payments for municipal taxes. The Alberta Government could then properly allocate these property taxes to the respective and impacted municipalities, ensuring they receive the revenues that are owed to them. This method could enhance efficiency and compliance, as the province already has a robust mechanism for managing and monitoring royalty payments. It could also relieve the burden on municipalities by giving them an effective way to ensure property tax collection.

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2024).

RMA Background

ER1-22S: Alberta Energy Regulator Action to Require Oil and Gas Companies to Pay Municipal Property Taxes

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) urge the Government of Alberta to direct the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) to amend the directives, policies and other processes (including directives 067 and 088) necessary to require any company regulated by the AER to pay all current and historical municipal property taxes in full as a condition of operating in Alberta; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the AER replace its current practice of relying on industry self-reporting of property tax payments by collaborating with the RMA and rural municipalities to develop a system by which rural municipalities can easily share unpaid property tax information with the AER.

[Click here](#) to view the full resolution.

Resolution 4-24F

Amend *Municipal Government Act* to Designate Police Funding Model Levy as Requisition

MD of Spirit River

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Municipal Affairs, Alberta Public Safety and Emergency Services

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta (GOA) introduced the Police Funding Model (PFM) in 2019; and

WHEREAS the PFM requires urban municipalities with a population under 5,000 and all rural municipalities to pay a portion of the provincial policing costs associated with the Provincial Police Services Agreement; and

WHEREAS the GOA does not permit municipalities to designate the police levy as a requisition on their tax rate bylaw nor on their tax notices because policing is not identified under Section 326(1)a of the *Municipal Government Act* as a requisition, even though Alberta Public Safety and Emergency Services issues an invoice for services which the municipality is required to pay; and

WHEREAS municipalities strive to be open and transparent to their ratepayers; and

WHEREAS municipalities want to make ratepayers aware that their property taxes are paying for policing services;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Government of Alberta allow municipalities to denote the collection of funds that cover the police funding model on taxation bylaws and tax notices by identifying the Police Funding Model payment as a requisition through the amendment of Section 326(1) of the *Municipal Government Act*.

Member Background

The Government of Alberta implemented the Police Funding Regulation on April 1st, 2020. Commencing January 2021, each urban municipality with a population of 5,000 or less and all rural municipalities are now issued an invoice annually to pay for police services in their municipality. The formula was created by the Government of Alberta based on equalized assessment, population, crime severity, shadow population and detachment location, which are all used to calculate what portion each municipality would be required to pay for frontline policing costs. These frontline police servicing costs were set to increase annually commencing in 2021 when the municipal contribution equaled 10%, incrementally increasing to 30% by 2024.

It is the goal of rural municipalities to be transparent with ratepayers about what they are paying for police services and The M.D. of Spirit River has treated the Policing Invoice as a provincial requisition. The M.D. of Spirit River made a decision back in 2021 to show ratepayers what their contribution, through their taxes, was to police services and has therefore identified "policing" on the taxation bylaw and tax notices, similar to the education requisition and the Alberta Housing Act managing body requisition. However, Municipal Affairs continually requests that the M.D. cease acknowledging the policing invoice as a requisition in this way because it is not identified in the *Municipal Government Act* (MGA) as a requisition.

During the recent Municipal Audit Program, Municipal Affairs insisted that the tax rate bylaw and the tax notices remove this reference as "requisition" because it is not identified in the MGA as a requisition under Sec. 326(1).

Rural municipalities believe that ratepayers should be aware of what the Alberta Justice & Solicitor General requires municipalities to pay for frontline police services and therefore is seeking to have the MGA amended to include policing services identified as a requisition under section 326(1).

In 2020, the Government was presented with a resolution from the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (4-20F) requesting that the MGA be amended to include policing services as a requisition. The Government's response to the request was that identifying the police services could create red tape for municipalities and greater administrative work to administer the levy. This suggestion is a fallacy; The M.D. was indicating the policing costs as a requisition and was directed by Municipal Affairs to stop because there was no legislative direction to do so. The M.D.'s actions were not an administrative "red tape" exercise but rather provided transparency as to what the policing costs were per tax roll. Municipalities are already identifying the school and Alberta Housing requisitions on their Tax Rate Bylaws and Taxation Notices so to include one more would not require anything more of the municipalities.

Additionally, despite Municipal Affairs having reviewed the "Financial Sections" of the MGA in late 2021, to date the request to have section 326(1) amended to identify policing services as a requisition has not been done.

Ratepayers in municipalities across the province should know what portion of their taxes are going to protect them through the policing paid to the Government of Alberta.

RMA Background

RMA has no active resolutions directly related to this issue.

Resolution 5-24F

Tax Credits for Volunteer Firefighting and Search and Rescue Volunteer Services

Athabasca County

Carried as amended

Advocacy Target: Alberta Municipal Affairs, Alberta Public Safety and Emergency Services, Emergency Preparedness Canada, Finance Canada

WHEREAS Canada has 90,000 volunteer firefighters who provide fire and all hazard emergency services to their communities; and

WHEREAS Canada has approximately 8,000 essential search and rescue volunteers who respond to thousands of incidents every year; and

WHEREAS many of these individuals receive some form of pay on call, an honorarium, or are given some funding to cover expenses, but they do not draw a living wage from firefighting; and

WHEREAS without volunteer firefighters and search and rescue volunteers, thousands of communities in Canada would have no fire and emergency response coverage; and

WHEREAS in 2013, the Government of Canada initiated a tax credit recognizing these individuals; and

WHEREAS volunteer firefighters and search and rescue volunteers can claim a \$3,000 tax credit if 200 hours of volunteer services were completed in a calendar year; and

WHEREAS the \$3,000 tax credit is inadequate to encourage recruitment and retention of volunteers or to properly recognize the risks and importance of their role; and

WHEREAS volunteer firefighters account for 71% of Canada's total firefighting essential first responders;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the governments of Alberta and Canada to increase the amount of the volunteer and paid on call firefighting and search and rescue volunteer services tax credit to \$10,000.

Member Background

Canada has 90,000 volunteer firefighters who provide fire and all hazard emergency services to their communities. Many of these individuals receive some form of pay on call, an honorarium, or are given some funding to cover expenses, but they do not draw a living wage from firefighting. About 30% of them pay out of pocket to cover expenses associated with the service they provide to their community. An additional 8,000 search and rescue volunteers also offer critical services.

Without volunteer firefighters and search and rescue volunteers, thousands of communities in Canada would have no fire and emergency response coverage. The tax base simply cannot handle the cost of a career department.

In 2013, the federal government initiated a tax credit recognizing these individuals, but that tax credit has not kept up with cost of living. MP Gord Johns has been calling on the federal government to increase this tax credit from \$3,000 to \$10,000.

Further information:

- The tax code of Canada currently allows volunteer firefighters and search and rescue volunteers to claim a \$3,000 tax credit if 200 hours of volunteer services were completed in a calendar year;
- This works out to a mere \$450 per year, which we allow these essential volunteers to keep of their own income from their regular jobs, \$2.25 an hour;
- If they volunteer more than 200 hours, which many do, this tax credit amounts to even less than \$3000;
- These essential volunteers not only put their lives on the line and give their time, training and efforts to Canadians, but they also allow cities and municipalities to keep property taxes lower than if paid services were implemented;
- The increased tax credit would also help retain these volunteers in a time when volunteerism is decreasing.

RMA Background

1-22F: Volunteer Firefighters as Medical First Responders

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to compensate municipalities that operate a fire service with volunteers or employees that are qualified as Medical First Responders in instances when those volunteers or employees respond to emergencies due to the absence or delay of provincial emergency medical technicians and paramedics in their service area.

[Click here](#) to view the full resolution.

Resolution 7-24F

Improved Water License Approval and Compliance Processes

Mountain View County

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Environment and Protected Areas, Alberta Energy and Minerals, Alberta Energy Regulator

WHEREAS the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) and Alberta Environment and Protected Areas (EPA) have duplicate responsibility to regulate fresh water use and approval of diversion licenses; and

WHEREAS EPA's primary responsibility is to protect and enhance Alberta's environment and ecosystems to ensure a sustainable future, making life better for Albertans; and

WHEREAS the AER is currently issuing fresh water Temporary Diversion Licenses (TDLs) for use by industry without verifying approvals have met the processes and policies developed by the EPA; and

WHEREAS residential and agricultural use of water should be prioritized above industry needs for hydraulic fracking; and

WHEREAS TDLs are not appealable and neither the AER nor EPA will accept statements of concern from the public prior to industry utilizing the TDLs;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta (GOA) to develop alternatives to the use of fresh water for hydraulic fracking;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the GOA require the oil and gas industry to reduce water use proportional to all other users if drought restrictions are implemented;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the GOA amend the *Responsible Energy Development Act* to remove from the mandate of the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) "to consider and decide applications and other matters under the *Water Act* in respect of energy resource activities" to ensure that all authority for granting water licenses falls to Alberta Environment and Protected Areas and that the AER continue to be responsible for industry compliance;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the GOA, without exception, require all Temporary Diversion License (TDL) applications, including those diversions from alluvial aquifers, follow the process outlined in legislation, policy and directives and that the information on which the approving authority has used to issue the TDL be made available to the public.

Member Background

On July 10, 2024, the office of the Alberta Auditor General shared the findings of their inquiry into the management practices of surface water in Alberta. The Surface Water Management Report of the Auditor General (July 2024) identifies four key findings that further support the resolution:

- License applications approved without support for key decisions
- Licensing guidelines unclear on use of discretion

- Insufficient monitoring of licensee compliance with requirements such as allocation and withdrawal limits
- No assurance licensee-submitted water usage is accurate and complete

We appreciate that the oil and gas industry is a major economic engine for Alberta, and do not intend for the suspension of hydraulic fracking practices utilizing freshwater. Rather, this resolution aims to achieve the following:

- Reducing the use of fresh water use in oil and gas operations by finding viable alternatives.
- Making the approving authority for TDLs the same approving authority for all water diversions in Alberta so that a holistic approach can be taken within the same governing body to ensure water is conserved and protected as per the intention of the Water Act.
- Ensure the application and approval process for TDLs follow the current Government legislation and policy when the approving authority considers a TDL.

It is important to increase transparency in the decision-making process regarding TDLs, ensuring applications and subsequent decisions are public information so that the public has confidence that all the criteria have been met and are complete.

In discussion with the Alberta drought response team the current process **that** should be followed is: the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) regulates non-saline (i.e., fresh) water use for the oil and gas sector. The use of non-saline water must be licensed under the Government of Alberta's Water Act. An application for a Water Act license is guided by the Water Conservation Policy for Upstream Oil and Gas Operations, and must identify the proposed location of water diversion, along with the maximum volume, rate and purpose, among other requirements. To discourage the use of fresh water, this policy requires applicants to demonstrate that they have considered and documented alternatives to fresh water as part of the application process. Another important aspect of the application process is to determine the risk level of water extraction from each water source.

However, in practice we observe the AER does not require demonstration of an applicant having considered non-saline water supplies, such as wastewater effluent or produced water, and that licenses are issued based on what the applicant asks for in terms of volume and rate. In cases where there is access to aquifer sources (through gravel extraction operations), the AER considers these volumes low risk and does not require policy to be followed. We believe the public would be much more understanding of freshwater use in oil and gas operations if the approving authority could demonstrate that they have made the applicants undertake all considerations as per policy, prior to accessing any fresh water sources.

According to the Surface Water Allocation Directives, there are clear guidelines for determining if license applications may be considered low risk. If the screening criteria are met, the Director may issue a license with standard protective clauses and conditions after having considered any matters of cumulative allocation and other timing or species-based criteria or limits as required by this directive. It has been brought to our attention that this directive is not being followed and screening criteria are not required when the AER deems the water body a low risk (examples are, but not limited to, alluvial aquifers). The directives do not state anywhere that the AER has their own discretion regarding low risk water bodies, and only that the screening criteria must be met.

Further examples of concern are TDLs being issued for spring fed water bodies/ponds/dugouts that have been created where none existed before, without the appropriate EPA approvals.

It is understood that in most levels of government, organizations within government tend to be both the approving and regulating authority. This holds true as well for municipal governments who are both the approving authority as well as responsible for compliance. However, we believe that with respect to water, the Legislation (Water Act) is clear that “The property in and the right to the diversion and use of all water in the province is vested in His Majesty in right of Alberta”. Much like municipal councils being unable to delegate their authority for land use decisions, we believe Alberta Environment and Protected Areas should not be able to delegate approvals for water licenses. The Water Act legislation falls under EPA and therefore we believe the only way for the province to take a holistic approach to water conservation is that all applications to divert water for any use should be approved by EPA only. The AER should continue to be the regulator of the TDLs and manage the compliance and complaint process.

We strongly encourage the Government of Alberta to implement a red tape reduction effort, if required, to make wastewater effluent more accessible (through policy changes if required) for alternative uses such as hydraulic fracking.

We have requested information on many occasions on how fresh water currently being utilized in oil and gas operations fits into the drought mitigation plans at the provincial level. It appears that the current requirements that would curtail freshwater usage for hydraulic fracking may not meet the moral obligations that most Albertans have regarding the hierarchy of how fresh water should be prioritized and allocated. We encourage the Government to implement clear triggers for reduction of freshwater usage for oil and gas operations in their drought mitigation plans so that Albertans can feel confident that we have struck a balance between industry use and residential and agricultural needs.

Relevant legislation, policy and other documents considered:

- Water Act
- Responsible Development Energy Act
- Guide to Groundwater Authorization
- Surface Water Allocation Directives
- Water Conservation Policy for Upstream Oil and Gas
- Surface Water Management Report of the Auditor General July 2024

RMA Background

2-23F: Amendments to the Municipal Government Act – Section 619

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta urge the Government of Alberta to amend Section 619 of the Municipal Government Act to state that decisions made by provincial regulators in granting licenses, permits, approvals and other authorizations under their jurisdiction must be consistent with municipal statutory land use planning related to the protection of productive agricultural lands, impacts on municipal infrastructure, existing land uses, and other possible local project impacts.

[Click here to view the full resolution.](#)

Resolution 8-24F

Reinforcing Railway Fire Mitigation Procedures

MD of Lesser Slave River

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Forestry and Parks, Alberta Transportation and Economic Corridors, Alberta Emergency Management Agency, Transport Canada, Natural Resources Canada, Emergency Preparedness Canada

WHEREAS wildfires pose a significant threat to rural municipalities in Alberta, endangering lives, property, and the environment; and

WHEREAS the rugged terrain and expansive forests found within many rural municipalities increase both the complexity of wildfire management and the urgency of preventative measures; and

WHEREAS wildfire seasons are growing increasingly longer and more intense, placing a significant strain on provincial and municipal wildfire resources; and

WHEREAS railways operate extensive railway infrastructure throughout Alberta, intersecting with wildland areas prone to fires; and

WHEREAS railway operations could result in the creation of fires; and

WHEREAS the implementation of effective mitigation measures during train movement could significantly reduce the occurrence and severity of wildfires in affected areas;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) advocate for the governments of Alberta and Canada to work with railway companies to enhance railway wildfire mitigation strategies and procedures; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the RMA advocate for railway companies to ensure adequate fire suppression assets follow trains during train movement within high fire risk areas during fire season as a means of mitigating wildfires.

Member Background

Wildfires have historically been a recurring challenge for rural municipalities in Alberta, posing a threat to public safety, property, and natural resources. With many rural municipalities containing areas of high fire risk, and given the growing threat and scope of wildfires, we are looking to mitigate these events through multiple avenues. One of these avenues is fire mitigation within railway operations, which have been identified as potential contributors to wildfire ignition due to factors such as sparks generated during train movement.

Despite the existence of corresponding regulations such as Transport Canada's Railway Extreme Heat and Fire Risk Mitigation Rules, recent incidents and developments, including high-profile wildfires and public concern over railway-related wildfire risks have underscored the urgency of revisiting wildfire mitigation strategies across all avenues, including railway operations.

It is worth noting that railway companies have made developments related to firefighting and mitigation, such as the implementation of extreme heat fire mitigation plans, and incorporating specialized firefighting trains into their fleets. Nonetheless, it is too early to fully understand the impact these will have on overall fire mitigation.

One specific avenue of enhancing railway wildfire mitigation is to advocate for railways to revert to the process of wildland fire mitigation followed up during train movement within areas of high fire risk. This would involve the use of fire suppression assets which would follow trains in high fire risk areas to quickly put out fires as they are created before they reach a substantial size. This is different from the above-mentioned firefighting trains, which are limited in quantity, and have a larger focus of fighting more established fires.

The impacts of wildfires in rural Alberta are profound, ranging from ecological damage and loss of biodiversity to threats to public safety, property, and livelihoods. Additionally, smoke and air pollution resulting from wildfires can have adverse effects on public health. By enhancing fire mitigation strategies and procedures across a wide range of potential contributors such as railway operations, we can proactively work to limit the threats posed by wildfires within Alberta.

Resources:

CN Fire Risk Mitigation Plan:

<https://www.cn.ca/-/media/files/your-industry/customer-reports/cn-extreme-weather-plan-en.pdf>

CN New Firefighting Trains:

<https://www.cn.ca/en/news/2024/05/cn-launches-new-firefighting-trains-to-help-protect-supply-chain>

Rail Transportation Safety Investigation Report:

<https://www.tsb.gc.ca/eng/rapports-reports/rail/2021/r21v0144/r21v0144.html>

Sparks from CN Train to Blame for Wildfires:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/brush-fires-train-tracks-edmonton-cn-rail-1.5286886>

Transport Canada Railway Extreme Heat and Fire Risk Mitigation Rules:

<https://tc.canada.ca/en/rail-transportation/rules/railway-extreme-heat-fire-risk-mitigation-rules>

TSB Warns of Locomotive Wildfire Risk:

<https://calgary.citynews.ca/2023/08/24/tsb-report-warns-that-unnoticed-locomotive-fires-pose-wildfire-risk/>

Transportation Safety Board of Canada Common Causes of Fire in Canada's Rail Transportation Sector:

<https://www.tsb.gc.ca/eng/medias-media/fiches-facts/r21v0143/r21v0143-20210715.html>

RMA Background

RMA has no active resolutions directly related to this issue.

Resolution 10-24F

Full-Time (24/7) Home Care Support in Lodges/Supportive Living Accommodations

Beaver County

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Seniors, Community and Social Services, Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services.

WHEREAS the needs of rural Alberta seniors lodge residents are increasing beyond the service levels provided by the traditional staffing model in seniors housing facilities; and

WHEREAS small rural communities wherein the seniors housing facilities are located face challenges to provide required amenities and community supports; and

WHEREAS relocation of seniors to higher-care facilities is contrary to the Government of Alberta's expressed desire to enable seniors to age in community (age in place), and imposes undue mental and physical stress on seniors; and

WHEREAS the mandate of the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services is to work with seniors lodge providers to expand seniors lodges and facilities to keep up with increased growth and demand;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to incentivize transportation and health care services to enable the provision of unscheduled home care for rural seniors, including those in supportive living accommodations.

Member Background

Seniors are the fastest-growing demographic in Canada. Between 2036 and 2041, Canada's senior population will grow to 25% of the total population. By 2051, 1 in 5 Albertans will be a senior.

Older adults continue to face unique challenges accessing required services and supports to enable them to live in their communities for as long as they desire. Of particular concern are Alberta's seniors residing in rural seniors' accommodations, whose needs are increasing while the availability of necessary health and social supports and services is decreasing.

Often, seniors in supportive living accommodations who require a few additional services that are minor or temporary in nature are assessed for higher levels of care simply because there are no health care workers available outside scheduled hours. Examples of such minor needs include personal hygiene support, evening medication assistance, physical support after an injury or infection, etc.

These higher levels of care come at the expense of the senior's health and the Alberta taxpayer.

Forced relocation of seniors to different facilities (and often in different communities) decreases their quality of life through isolation, loneliness, loss of dignity, and physical and mental stress.

The cost of providing continuing care is higher than that of supportive living due to a higher resident-to-support staff ratio, specialized care, adapted facilities and equipment, etc.

Enhanced provision of training programs for Licensed Practical Nurses can increase the availability of staffing to support service provision. Furthermore, funding of transportation incentives for home care services will eliminate gaps between urban and rural healthcare provision within Alberta Health Services. The incentive to provide home care assistance within rural communities, including within supportive living facilities, will ensure a personal approach that seniors require and will reduce pressure on continuing care homes.

Incentivizing home care transportation to rural areas will allow for the provision of services and will support seniors housing foundations and the communities they call 'home. Filling vacancies in rural supportive living facilities is a challenge. Allowing seniors to age in place contributes to a sense of community, encourages local employment and economic development, keeps rural seniors' facilities open, and supports the viability of rural Alberta.

A similar resolution was passed at the 2024 Alberta Seniors & Community Housing Association Convention.

RMA Background

17-23F: Sustainable Community Hospice Funding Model

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate for the Government of Alberta to implement a sustainable operational funding model for the provision of hospice services by community hospice societies across the province.

[Click here](#) to view the full resolution.

10-23F: Enhancing Home Care Services for Rural Residents in Alberta

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to enhance home care services for rural residents by increasing funding, improving accessibility, implementing innovative care models such as community-based care tailored for rural settings, and other means.

[Click here](#) to view the full resolution.

Resolution 11-24F

Enhanced Brushing Along Powerlines to Mitigate Wildfires

MD of Lesser Slave River

Carried as amended

Advocacy Target: Alberta Forestry and Parks, Alberta Affordability and Utilities

WHEREAS wildfires pose a significant threat to rural municipalities in Alberta, endangering lives, property, and natural resources; and

WHEREAS powerlines traverse vast areas of the province, including areas of high fire risk; and

WHEREAS overgrown vegetation along powerlines increases the risk of wildfires due to potential contact with power infrastructure; and

WHEREAS select locations across the province feature a single egress, creating a risk of individuals becoming trapped if a fire were to occur along this single egress; and

WHEREAS proactive measures such as brushing along powerlines have been proven effective in reducing wildfire risk by creating firebreaks and limiting the spread of fires; and

WHEREAS the current level of brushing along powerlines in high-risk areas does not adequately mitigate wildfire risk; and

WHEREAS the rugged terrain and expansive forests found within many rural municipalities increase both the complexity of wildfire management and the urgency of preventative measures; and

WHEREAS the cost of wildfire suppression and recovery places a significant burden on provincial and municipal resources;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) urge relevant provincial authorities to prioritize and expand brushing initiatives along powerlines on all lands within forested areas to reduce the risk of wildfires;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the RMA advocate to relevant provincial authorities for a comprehensive review of powerline right-of-way widths across the province, considering local conditions, tree length, surrounding vegetation, and fire risk to ensure adequate right-of-way widths are in place for purposes of wildfire mitigation through vegetation management.

Member Background

Wildfires have long been a concern for rural municipalities in Alberta, posing a significant threat to public safety, infrastructure, agriculture, and the environment. The impact of wildfires extends beyond immediate damages, often resulting in long-term economic and ecological repercussions.

In recent years, the risk of wildfires has been exacerbated by factors such as climate change, prolonged droughts, and the encroachment of vegetation into areas near powerlines. Powerlines act as a common ignition source for wildfires, causing 85 wildfires within Alberta in 2023. When vegetation comes into

contact with powerlines, the risk of ignition increases substantially, leading to devastating wildfires that can spread rapidly and unpredictably.

To address this risk, brushing initiatives along powerlines have emerged as a proactive measure to mitigate wildfire danger. Brushing involves the removal or trimming of vegetation near powerlines to create a buffer zone, reducing the likelihood of sparks igniting nearby vegetation. By creating firebreaks and reducing fuel loads, brushing initiatives not only decrease the risk of wildfires but also facilitate more effective firefighting efforts by providing access to affected areas. However, given the increased length and severity of recent fire seasons, many rural municipalities continue to face significant wildfire risk due to a level of brushing along powerlines which is now inadequate, leaving communities vulnerable to the devastating consequences of uncontrolled wildfires.

Specifically, within the M.D. of Lesser Slave River, fires caused by powerlines have endangered residents. Additionally, the threat of this risk is amplified within local roads surrounded by forest which only consist of one entrance/exit, resulting in the possibility of residents becoming trapped if a fire were to block the exit. Because of this, we are looking to proactively reduce the risk of this happening through improved brushing programs among powerlines on applicable lands.

The expansion of brushing initiatives along powerlines is crucial for enhancing wildfire prevention and mitigation strategies in rural municipalities. By proactively managing vegetation near powerlines, Alberta can reduce the frequency and severity of wildfires, thereby safeguarding communities, infrastructure, and natural resources.

It should be recognized that regulation exists regarding tree and vegetation brushing near utilities. It is also worth recognizing that Alberta's electricity distribution companies have made great steps in vegetation management processes, which should be celebrated. With that being said, the continued occurrence of wildfires because of vegetation's contact with these utilities indicates that there is still more work to be done on this front.

In summary, this resolution aims to achieve the outcome of mitigating wildfires through an enhanced process of brushing powerlines. By investing in proactive measures to reduce wildfire risk, Alberta can strengthen the safety, resilience, and sustainability of communities across the province.

Relevant Sources:

Alberta Wildfire Season Statistics:

<https://open.alberta.ca/publications/alberta-wildfire-season-statistics>

Altalink Vegetation Management:

<https://www.altalink.ca/safety-and-preparedness/vegetation-management/>

Atco Integrated Vegetation Management Plan

https://electric.atco.com/content/dam/web/atco-electric/IVM%20Plan_Final.pdf

Fortis Alberta Wildfire Mitigation:

<https://www.fortisalberta.com/about-us/sustainability/our-environment/wildfire-mitigation>

RMA Background

RMA has no active resolutions directly related to this issue.

Resolution 12-24F

Accountability in the Establishment of an Independent Agency Police Service in Alberta

Thorhild County and County of Northern Lights

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Public Safety and Emergency Services

WHEREAS the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) has been clear in its opposition to the creation of an Alberta Provincial Police Service; and

WHEREAS RMA has formally requested that rural municipalities be consulted on proposed *Police Act* changes and the future of policing in Alberta; and

WHEREAS the regulation implementing the current Police Funding Model, introduced by the Government of Alberta in 2020, is due to expire at the end of 2024; and

WHEREAS an independent agency police service may be created by the Government of Alberta through unilateral amendments to the *Police Act* that were not considered by municipalities or key stakeholders prior to their introduction and adoption; and

WHEREAS while an independent agency police service may provide supportive functions to existing Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), municipal, or Indigenous and First Nations Police Services, no consultation was provided to any such existing agency, thereby not accounting for cost, personnel, or other service impacts; and

WHEREAS the Government of Canada has confirmed and committed to the RCMP's role in providing contract policing until the end of current contract agreements in 2032 and beyond for all interested contract partners, as communicated to all provincial ministers of Public Safety in Spring 2024;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate that the Government of Alberta provide a public itemized costing of any independent agency police service, complete with a detailing of costs borne by municipalities through the existing or a future Police Funding Model facilitated by the Government of Alberta;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the Government of Alberta not introduce an independent agency police service prior to substantive consultation and quantifiable significant majority support from municipalities and Albertans-at-large.

Member Background

Introduced on March 13, 2024, Bill 11, the *Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024* amends the *Police Act* to create an independent agency police service (IAPS) and oversight board (OB). Of concern to all Alberta municipalities is the ability granted through the legislation for Alberta's Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services to launch an IAPS in any area of the province without significant mechanisms for the involvement and consideration of local leadership.

Details such as a timeline, full consideration of the scope or mandate, governance and oversight, municipal engagement, recruitment and retention, detailed costs, deployment and more regarding

the implementation of an IAPS are not currently available to municipalities and Albertans. The Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services has stated that the intention of the legislation is for IAPS officers to take on “police-like functions” that are currently carried out by the Alberta Sheriffs and to support the Alberta RCMP, municipal police services, and First Nations police services. However, the inclusion of the IAPS through this legislation in the Police Act means that any possible IAPS officer is of the same legislative position as other police officers in Alberta. This is contrary to expanding the role of the Alberta Sheriffs, as Sheriffs are granted authorities under the existing Peace Officer Act. With the next iteration of the Police Funding Model due to be implemented for the 2025-2026 fiscal year, these considerations must be duly examined prior to any future changes in the costs levied to municipalities for their public safety services, and prior to any further advancement toward the establishment of any IAPS.

Municipalities and public safety partners such as the Alberta Sheriffs, the Alberta RCMP, or municipal police agencies like the Edmonton Police Service or Calgary Police Service were not consulted on this legislation. Without the fulsome consultation and involvement of key stakeholders and local leaders throughout the bill’s development, the legislation does not comprehensively consider the impact it will have on any municipality that is under the jurisdiction of a possible IAPS. The Rural Municipalities of Alberta have formally expressed opposition to the launch of an Alberta Provincial Police Service and changes made to the Police Act without due consultation, per resolution 4-22S and resolution 2-21S. The consideration of this Bill without due consultation with municipalities adds to the amount of legislative changes, programs, and other initiatives implemented unilaterally by the Government without recognizing municipalities’ role in governance and the advancement of their communities’ interests.

RMA Background

4-22S: Continued Support for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Alberta

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request that the Government of Alberta not create an Alberta Provincial Police Service.

[Click here](#) to view the full resolution.

Resolution 13-24F

Review of Broadband Funding Application Processes

Sturgeon County

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Technology and Innovation, Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada

WHEREAS the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) deems broadband a “basic” or “essential” service for Canadians; and

WHEREAS broadband service in rural, remote and northern communities is slower, with less capacity (bandwidth) and significantly higher cost than services in urban centres; and

WHEREAS broadband connectivity is vital to ensuring rural residents are not left behind in accessing online services (e.g., online learning, education, employment, and health, financial and government e-services); and

WHEREAS providing these services in rural and remote areas requires innovative strategies and partnerships; and

WHEREAS the Government of Canada (GOC) has a goal to provide access to high-speed internet to all Canadians by 2030; and

WHEREAS the GOC defines highspeed internet as 50 megabits per second (mbps) download and 10 mbps upload speeds; and

WHEREAS there is a role for all levels of government to play in promoting the development of high-speed internet service; and

WHEREAS current federal and provincial funding programs, including the Alberta Broadband Fund, limit municipalities’ application options;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate that the governments of Alberta and Canada accelerate the implementation of broadband infrastructure projects in rural Alberta and improve the quality of the National Broadband Internet Service Availability Map to reflect connectivity speeds actually experienced by rural residents and businesses.

Member Background

Access to broadband allows Canadians to fully participate in the digital economy and take advantage of quality-of-life services, including telehealth, e-learning and access to government and social services, and for businesses to innovate, expand their markets, and lower operational costs.

Broadband access remains the single largest barrier to digital advancement for rural communities.

The Government of Canada’s \$2.75 billion Universal Broadband Fund (UBF) left many rural municipalities ineligible for funding due to imprecise grant eligibility maps. Additionally, a large portion

of the Government of Alberta’s \$390 million funding to improve high-speed internet went to “top-up” UBF applications, but relies on identical eligibility criteria, again preventing many rural municipalities from receiving funding.

The Government of Alberta had also earmarked \$36 million in Alberta Broadband Fund (ABF) funding, with the intent to “help ensure every rural, remote, and Indigenous household in the province can access high-speed internet.” The ABF has two streams with some other eligibility criteria separate from the UBF; however, rural municipalities continue to face challenges. If changes are made to existing eligibility criteria it could have the potential to expedite the process for improving rural broadband speeds.

By strengthening their programs and relying on accurate speed test data, the Government of Alberta and the Government of Canada can create a more effective strategy for rural broadband deployment. Strengthening their programs would not only accelerate the implementation of broadband infrastructure but ensure that rural Albertans can fully participate in and benefit from the digital economy and society, achieving shared outcomes more rapidly than if each order of government pursued its initiatives independently.

RMA Background

5-23S: Access to Mobile Wireless (Cellular) Services

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta engage the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission to address the lack of reliable cellular network coverage for mobile wireless (cellular) service.

[Click here to view the full resolution.](#)

Resolution 14-24F

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Coverage for Community Peace Officers Under the *Workers' Compensation Act*

Brazeau County

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Public Safety and Emergency Services, Alberta Jobs, Economy and Trade

WHEREAS Bill 1: *Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2012*, was introduced to amend *the Workers' Compensation Act* to include provisions under part 4, that if a first responder, correctional officer, emergency dispatcher or a member of any other class of worker prescribed by regulations is, or has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder by a physician or psychologist, the post-traumatic stress disorder shall be presumed, unless the contrary is proven, to be an injury that arose out of and occurred during the course of the worker's employment; and

WHEREAS public safety personnel are at an increased risk for developing a psychological injury due to the nature of their work and 44.5% meet the criteria for one or more mental disorders; and

WHEREAS post-traumatic stress disorder is a potentially disabling condition that is now a widely recognized public health issue, particularly among public safety personnel. and

WHEREAS the *Workers' Compensation Act*, part 4, defines a "first responder" as a firefighter, paramedic, peace officer, or police officer; and

WHEREAS the Government of Canada has confirmed and committed to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's role in providing contract policing to the end of current contract agreements in 2032 and beyond for all interested contract partners, as communicated to all provincial Ministers of Public Safety in Spring 2024; and

WHEREAS the *Workers' Compensation Act*, part 4, defines a "peace officer" as an individual appointed as a peace officer under section 7 of the *Peace Officer Act* who is authorized by that appointment to use the title "Sheriff"; and

WHEREAS the restricted definition of "peace officer" to only include those authorized to use the title of Sheriff under part 4 of the *Workers' Compensation Act*, does not encompass approximately 3000 community peace officers and peace officers throughout Alberta under the presumptive provisions for PTSD coverage; and

WHEREAS municipalities, their residents, businesses, and visitors benefit from having community peace officers in their communities to preserve and maintain the public peace and benefit from an engaged mentally healthy and resilient workforce;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) advocate for the Government of Alberta (GOA) to, by regulation, add all peace officers appointed under the *Peace Officer Act* as an "other class of worker" referred to in section 24.2(2) of the *Workers' Compensation Act* until such time as the Act can be amended;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the RMA advocate for the GOA to amend the definition of “Peace Officer” under the *Workers’ Compensation Act*, Part 4, section 24.2(1)(f) to include all peace officers appointed under section 7 of the *Peace Officer Act*.

Member Background

Under the *Workers’ Compensation Act*, in Part 4; Compensation Entitlement, Application and Payment, workers are entitled to compensation under the WCA if the worker suffers personal injury by accident, unless the injury is attributable primarily to the serious and willful misconduct of the worker, and to the dependents of a worker who dies as a result of an accident.

Further, under Part 4, is PTSD presumptions, specifically section 24.2 where if a first responder, correctional officer, emergency dispatcher or a member of any other class of worker prescribed by regulations is or has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder by a physician or psychologist, the post-traumatic stress disorder shall be presumed, unless the contrary is proven, to be an injury that arose out of and occurred during the course of the worker's employment.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric disorder that may occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, a serious incident, a terrorist act, war/combat, or rape or who have been threatened with death, sexual violence, or serious injury. A study conducted by Carleton et al. (2018) investigated the proportion of Canadian public safety personnel reporting symptom clusters consistent with various mental disorders. The results indicated that 23.2% of the total sample screened positive for PTSD (in contrast, estimates of the prevalence of PTSD among the general population range from 1.1 to 3.5%).

As of 2020, the Government of Alberta indicated that the province has more than 30,000 part and full-time police officers, firefighters, and paramedics. Section 24.2(1)(d) of the Act defines first responders as a firefighter, paramedic, peace officer, or police officer. However, when reviewing the definition of peace officer under section 24.2(1)(f), it defines a peace officer as an individual appointed as a peace officer under section 7 of the *Peace Officer Act* who is authorized by that appointment to use the title “Sheriff”.

According to the Government of Alberta, there are approximately 3,000 peace officers in Alberta that are employed by approximately 290 authorized employers such as municipalities, post-secondary institutions, hospitals, and police agencies. These community peace officers are appointed under section 7 of the *Peace Officer Act* but are only permitted by the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General to use the title of Peace Officer or Community Peace Officer, and not the title of Sheriff. Therefore, there are approximately 3,000 community peace officers that are not covered under section 24.2 of the *Workers’ Compensation Act* and compensation will not be presumed. Workers that do not fall under the definition of a first responder, are still able to submit a claim for PTSD, or other psychological diagnosis. Adjudication of these psychological injury claims will occur in the same manner as other WCB claims.

According to the Government of Alberta, which is responsible for the *Workers’ Compensation Act*, in Alberta, they indicated that a committee review is required every 10 years for the Act. The most recent committee review was completed in 2020. At that time, there was an amendment to the definition of workers covered under the presumptive coverage, which still does not encompass community peace officers.

Peace officers and community peace officers are across Alberta providing services to protect Albertans. Community peace officers are in communities and institutions to “preserve and maintain the public peace”. To that end, these dedicated community peace officers can become involved in serious, traumatic, and life altering events. These events include but are not limited to physical confrontations; motor vehicle collisions where severe injury or death has occurred; transporting or assisting in the transportation of deceased people within hospitals; providing first-aid medical services such as CPR; amongst others. Roles that are consistent with “first responders” such as firefighters, paramedics, police officers, and sheriffs, are currently covered under the Act.

Under the Public Security Peace Officer Program Policy and Procedures Manual, issued through the Government of Alberta, community peace officers are permitted to provide emergency response while operating emergency vehicles, to injury collisions, attending fire or medical situations at the request of the Fire or EMS department, to any emergent situation if requested by the police service to attend in an emergency response capacity, or to provide backup to police or peace officers where there is a reasonable belief that the officer is in serious danger.

There has been no previous advocacy or resolutions pertaining to this specific topic through Rural Municipalities of Alberta. However, in 2017, the County of St. Paul brought forward a resolution, which was adopted, titled “Specialized Clinical Counselling and Therapy for Distressed Emergency First Responders”. The resolution requested “that the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties strongly encourages the Government of Alberta to create and staff a governmental unit capable of providing specialized clinical counselling and therapy for distressed emergency first responders capable of servicing and travelling to all regions of the province.” While this resolution does not speak directly to community peace officers and their inclusion into the WCB definition of first responders; it does recognize the strain on an individual performing duties of a first responder.

Should this amendment be made to the *Workers’ Compensation Act* and community peace officers are defined as first responders under the *Workers’ Compensation Act*, community peace officers would also be recognized under the *Heroes’ Compensation Act* as first responders. This Act provides a lump sum payment of \$100,000 being paid to the dependent(s), or the estate, of a first responder that dies as a result of an accident defined by the *Workers’ Compensation Act*.

Sources

<https://psychiatry.org/patients-families/ptsd/what-is-ptsd>

<https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/17/4/1234/htm>

<https://ourspace.uregina.ca/bitstream/handle/10294/9055/Glossary%20of%20Terms%20Version%202017.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y>

RMA Background

RMA has no active resolutions directly related to this issue.

Resolution 15-24F

Member Committee to Understand the Criminal Justice System

County of Barrhead

Carried

Advocacy Target: Rural Municipalities of Alberta

WHEREAS the complexity of the Canadian criminal justice system creates ongoing confusion and frustration when trying to address rural crime and safety within rural communities; and

WHEREAS rural crime continues to be an issue regardless of the small decreases in provincial key crime indicator statistics reported for the second quarter of 2024; and

WHEREAS February 2023 Statistics Canada data presents a clear picture of how over the past 10 years, the gap between rural and urban crime statistics has widened; and

WHEREAS the 2023 RMA Rural Perception of Policing in Alberta survey illustrates the frustration and lack of faith that taxpayers have with the criminal courts and criminal justice system; and

WHEREAS many elected officials and agencies are trying to develop solutions to address rural crime and the impact on their communities; and

WHEREAS these attempts are often emotional conversations met with the response “that’s not our jurisdiction”; and

WHEREAS the RMA previously supported members in understanding a complex topic by creating the Quasi-Judicial Agencies Member Committee (QJAC) to conduct research and consider solutions to issues created by quasi-judicial agencies approval processes;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta create a member committee to examine and understand the challenges of addressing rural crime and improve RMA members’ collective knowledge of how the criminal justice system works;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the committee develop recommended solutions and advocacy approaches for criminal justice systems changes that will support safe rural communities.

Member Background

If you don’t know how something works, how can you fix it? What tools would you use?

Elected officials continue to raise awareness and attempt to contribute to solutions to address rural crime. Efforts are met with limited success, likely due in part to the complexity of the Canadian Criminal Justice System, the multiple levels of authority and decision-making and the overarching impact of social issues. Results for recent RMA resolutions on this topic are currently incomplete:

- 11-23S - Reforming the Bail System to Address Rural Crime: resolution is still active and targets a specific component of the larger, complex Canadian Criminal Justice System – current status for the response is “Intent not met”
- 2-18S - Combatting Rural Crime: resolution expired in 2021 leaving an “Accepted in Part” status for the responses from the Government of Alberta, Government of Canada and Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

“Justice is a revolving door”, “not our jurisdiction” and “justice is not a tool that fixes social issues” are all common phrases used by various levels of government when rural municipalities raise concerns about rural crime. Although all three statements may be accurate to an extent, RMA members still need to understand the complex system in which we are working to make recommendations for meaningful and impactful change. We are led to believe that mental health and drug addictions can lead to crime, and similarly crime can lead to further addictions, continuing the cycle; how can we address one without understanding the other? Furthermore, provincial jails do not have drug treatment programs as they are just short-term housing (less than 2 yrs), with many detainees staying on average 6-8 months, an insufficient period of time for detox. Federal jails, however, do have drug treatment programs as detainees are staying for more than 2 yrs.

Municipalities are often involved in providing or funding support services in our communities. How do we know which services should be provided, or which services would be the most effective if we don’t know what the gaps in the system are? How do we learn about the various components and lines of responsibility/authority so we can have informed conversations and be part of finding the solutions that will lead to meaningful change in our communities?

Despite the efforts, we are not seeing the results that are desperately needed. The most recent Statistics Canada Report, 2023 (which reflects 2021 data) clearly shows that rural crime is still a significant issue.

- Rural police services served about 15% of the population in Canada, and yet reported 21% of all Criminal Code & Federal Statute related crimes.
- Crime rate is a measure of the volume of crime related to population. Crime rates reflected 7,033 criminal code incidents / 100,000 rural population which is 43% higher than the urban population, while the rural violent crime rate was 76% higher than the urban population.
- Crime Severity Index (CSI) is a measure of the volume and relative seriousness of crimes. CSI is 33% higher in rural areas than in urban areas, with violent CSI even higher in rural areas at 46%.
- Property offences represent the main category of crime in both rural and urban areas and reflect the most similar statistics, however, rural crime rates are still 22% higher than urban.
- Across Canada, the prairie provinces record the highest rural CSI with Alberta ranking 3rd behind Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Municipalities want to be part of the conversation to achieve change that will address rural crime across Alberta. To do that we need to understand all the stakeholders, their roles and responsibilities and how the various components of the system are integrated, similar to the approach recently used by QJAC. RMA could once again provide the leadership and resources to support its members in acquiring the

necessary knowledge and strengthening the rural voice in advocating for meaningful change to address rural crime.

RMA Background

11-23S: Reforming the Bail System to Address Rural Crime

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to:

1. Require that justices receive a complete bail package, that a summary of the details of the arrest circumstances be read before the courts, and that reverse onus situations be identified;
2. Increase funding to enable the Edmonton bail office to be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week;
3. Advocate to the Government of Canada to amend the bail ladder system such that if an accused has not lived up to the conditions of a no cash bail from a previous charge or offence, then a judge must now move forward with a cash bail alternative for this and future offences;
4. Direct the Government of Alberta to complete a cross-jurisdictional analysis of other provinces to see how they address bail packages, bail Crown offices, bail ladder systems, and any other issue that may be impacting the increase in catch and release of criminals;
5. Create a bail sub-committee composed of municipal and Alberta Justice representatives to examine other bail systems, canvass Albertans on ideas for improving the justice system, and present an annual report with recommendations to the Minister of Justice.

[Click here](#) to view the full resolution.

Resolution 16-24F

Wildlife Predator Compensation Program Amendment to Include Coyotes

Clear Hills County

Carried as amended

Advocacy Target: Alberta Environment and Protected Areas, Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation

WHEREAS coyote predation is a significant concern for livestock producers across Alberta, due to considerable economic losses, especially during the calving season; and

WHEREAS according to the Government of Alberta, the coyote is the major predator of livestock in Alberta, accounting for over 75% of all predation losses each year; and

WHEREAS current information and statistics on rural coyote predation losses are limited; and

WHEREAS the current provisions under the *Agricultural Pest Act*, which designate the coyote as a "nuisance" and provide authority for coyote control on a landowner's property, are insufficient in mitigating the growing coyote population and the resulting livestock losses; and

WHEREAS the rapid increase in the coyote population exacerbates the predation problem, leading to greater financial strain on livestock producers;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request that the Government of Alberta review and amend the terms of the Wildlife Predator Compensation Program to include coyotes as a compensable species, thereby providing financial restitution to livestock producers for losses due to coyote predation.

Member Background

In many rural municipalities, the ongoing issue of coyote predation on livestock has escalated, with coyote populations increasing rapidly each year.

The inclusion of coyotes in the Wildlife Predator Compensation Program is crucial for providing adequate support to livestock producers who suffer substantial losses due to coyote predation. As the coyote population continues to grow unchecked, the financial burden on livestock producers, particularly those in the cattle industry, becomes increasingly unsustainable. A comprehensive review and amendment of the compensation program, along with proactive monitoring and management strategies, will help mitigate these impacts and support the agricultural community in Alberta.

RMA Background

RMA has no active resolutions directly related to this issue.

Resolution 17-24F

Improved Grizzly Bear Management to Ensure Human, Livestock and Wildlife Safety

MD of Pincher Creek

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Forestry and Parks, Alberta Public Safety and Emergency Services

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta (GOA) is responsible for the monitoring and management strategies for grizzly bears; and

WHEREAS the Environmental Enforcement Branch of Alberta Forestry and Parks (Conservation Officers) is responsible for conserving and protecting Alberta's natural resources and Crown lands through the provision of education, prevention, public safety and conservation enforcement services; and

WHEREAS Conservation Officers are mandated to promote the protection of life and safety across all public lands through effective human-wildlife conflict prevention; and

WHEREAS due to the increasing number of grizzly bears and the expansion of their territories, the grizzly bear is becoming increasingly habituated to living within proximity to humans; and

WHEREAS problem bear encounters are increasing, creating a heightened safety issue for rural residents in areas along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains; and

WHEREAS bear encounters present both an agriculture or livestock predation risk and a human safety risk for those living and working in these rural areas; and

WHEREAS a very small percentage of grizzly bears become problem bears, but these bears have to be dealt with quickly and efficiently; and

WHEREAS the current management plan and number of conservation officers and wildlife specialists do not allow problem bears to be properly addressed; and

WHEREAS this problem is compounded by the GOA's continued underfunding of Conservation Officers and problem wildlife specialists;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to increase funding for Conservation Officers and problem wildlife specialists to ensure that an updated and properly funded grizzly bear management plan is in place to protect both the public and bears.

Member Background

Grizzly bears are found in the foothills, mountains and boreal regions of the province. Their current range includes areas in or near the Rocky Mountains and in some boreal forest areas of north-central and northwestern Alberta.

Grizzly bears searching for food can be attracted to human settlements and agricultural areas, greatly increasing the potential for human-bear conflict. Bears that come into conflict are at increased risk of

being killed or trapped and relocated. The annual rate of conflict has been increasing in some areas of the province, likely due to recovering grizzly populations.

Due to the increasing number of grizzly bears and the expansion of their territories, there is a heightened safety issue for the rural residents of our municipality and most areas along the eastern slopes of the Rockies in Alberta. Grizzly bears are becoming increasingly habituated to living within proximity to humans and problem bear encounters are increasing.

Adding to this problem is that the Government of Alberta has continued to cut the budget for Conservation Officers and problem wildlife specialists. We currently have only one officer within the Municipality of Pincher Creek. for whom it is difficult to keep up with the number of problem bear calls, let alone handle the rest of their required duties.

There is a lack of clarity in how the Ministry of Forestry and Park's Ministerial Order 43/2024 is going to be implemented and how it will address all grizzly bears, including nuisance bears with cubs. On initial review of Order 43/2024, it is apparent that wildlife officers will play a major role in the implementation and success of the proposed program. Again, more trained and in-field personnel are required.

Only a tiny percentage of grizzly bears become problem bears. But those bears have to be dealt with quickly and efficiently. The current management plan and number of officers do not allow this to happen.

RMA Background

RMA has no active resolutions directly related to this issue.

Resolution 18-24F

Renewable Electricity and Grid Stability

Kneehill County

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Affordability and Utilities, Alberta Utilities Commission

WHEREAS the Alberta Utilities Commission has the ability to unilaterally approve renewable energy power plant proposals; and

WHEREAS Albertans expect and require the provision of electricity through a stable electrical grid; and

WHEREAS municipalities and the Government of Alberta require a stable, reliable, and robust electrical grid for economic development; and

WHEREAS Alberta has experienced shortfalls in meeting electrical demand; and

WHEREAS renewable energy development and expansion continues to be a provincially supported initiative;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to adopt requirements for Alberta Utilities Commission-approved renewable energy developments to have an identified minimum amount of electricity available to contribute to Alberta's electrical grid on demand.

Member Background

The Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) was established under the *Alberta Utilities Commission Act* in 2008, with a mandate to regulate the utility sectors, including electricity and natural gas, and to ensure fair and reliable service. The AUC oversees the approval of utility infrastructure projects and ensures compliance with regulatory standards. The AUC's Rule 007, initially designed to guide the approval process for renewable energy projects, has undergone several revisions to address emerging challenges and regulatory needs. These revisions reflect the evolving landscape of renewable energy and the growing importance of incorporating municipal perspectives into the approval process.

Federal policies, including the Climate Change Plan and Clean Electricity Regulations, have influenced the Government of Alberta's renewable energy strategies. These policies provide funding and support for renewable energy projects and set national targets for greenhouse gas reductions. Coordination between provincial and federal regulations plays a role in ensuring that Alberta's renewable energy initiatives align with broader climate goals. We aim to balance the pursuit of broader climate goals with the well-being of our rural communities and the stability of Alberta's electrical grid for the benefit of our people and businesses.

Alberta has increased its focus on renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar power, driven by both provincial policies and federal climate commitments. Since the early 2000s, Alberta has seen significant investments in renewable energy, positioning itself as a leader in this sector within Canada. The shift towards renewable energy in Alberta has brought benefits, including increased property tax

revenues for rural municipalities and job creation in local communities. However, it has also introduced large challenges such as land use conflicts, siting inequality between rural and urban municipalities, infrastructure strain, and potential environmental impacts. Municipalities have faced difficulties in balancing the benefits of renewable energy projects with concerns related to land use, agricultural productivity, and environmental preservation. There is a prevailing sentiment that the influence of our rural communities at the provincial level has been marginalized.

The AUC continues to make decisions in “the public interest” seemingly without considering the public interest pertaining to the electrical grid's stability. An electrical grid must be reliable, resilient, and stable. At the present time, renewable energy developments do not appear able to support these requirements. As renewable energy developments are increasingly relied upon, this is problematic for Alberta’s people and businesses, which require stable electricity during all times and seasons.

Uptake of renewable energy in the grid, corresponding to increasingly distributed power generation, can lead naturally to improved grid function insofar as synchrony is concerned. However, to function, grids must be resilient to transient shocks, such as line failures or overloads. These failures can cascade through the grid, causing widespread power outages and damage.

The intended objective of this resolution is to ask the Government of Alberta to require AUC-approved renewable energy developments to contribute stated minimum electricity contributions to the grid on demand. This would create more stability, reliability, and resiliency. How this is accomplished, through means such as battery storage, third-party supply agreements, etc., would be open and up to the developer. The minimum threshold could be made relative to the size of the development.

RMA Background

23-22F: Small Scale Generation Regulation – Interconnection Challenges

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to apply distribution and transmission connection timelines and study exemptions that are currently provided to micro-generation projects under Alberta Utility Commission Rule 24 to community generation projects under five Megawatts.

[Click here](#) to view the full resolution.

Resolution 19-24F

Exemption from Food Banks Canada’s Standard of Excellence and Accreditation Requirements for Small and/or Rural Local Food Banks

Brazeau County

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Seniors, Community and Social Services, Food Banks Alberta, Food Banks Canada, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

WHEREAS Food Banks Canada supports a network of 10 provincial associations and 5,100 hunger relief organizations from coast to coast to coast, in every province and territory; and

WHEREAS the food banking network acknowledged a need for a set of standards that would create performance benchmarks of a well-run organization, while promoting transparency and accountability to the public; and

WHEREAS Food Banks Canada formed a National Standards Committee, to develop and inform the standards ultimately proposed to Food Banks Canada’s board in 2021. These standards were then piloted to a group of small, medium and large food banks, as well as provincial associations, as a “real world” test and an opportunity to provide feedback, review and refinement; and

WHEREAS Food Banks Canada released their Standards of Excellence in January of 2024 which consist of expectations for all food banks in Canada to complete and receive accreditation by March 2025; and

WHEREAS Indigenous communities and northern food banks are exempt from the Standards of Excellence; and

WHEREAS Food Banks Alberta, a member of Food Banks Canada, has over 100 members and offers programs and assistance to those members such as food sharing programs, the Bulk Food Purchase Subsidy Program, and the Rural Assistance Program; and

WHEREAS there are 69 rural municipalities within Alberta with several food banks among them; and

WHEREAS many of these rural food banks are run by small groups who have neither the volunteers nor resources required to meet the Standards of Excellence; and

WHEREAS failure to comply to the Standards of Excellence results in local food banks losing their membership with both Food Banks Canada and Food Banks Alberta and, as a result, lose access to important resources and programs; and

WHEREAS many local food banks have expressed concern about longevity should memberships to these organizations be suspended;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate the Government of Alberta to add further exemptions to the Standards of Excellence established by Food Banks Canada for small, rural food banks similar to the exemption to northern and Indigenous food banks.

Member Background

The Food Banks Canada Standards of Excellence includes requirements for members to achieve accreditation including, but not limited to, processes for addressing complaints, risk management plans, and digital inventory management. Our local food banks have expressed concern about the added work this will have for their small volunteer base. These concerns have also been raised with Food Bank Alberta's regional meeting and include:

- Volunteers are already overworked, attributed to the increased demand for hampers
- Volunteers are hard to recruit and retain
- Because many rural food banks source their food from non-traditional sources, they may be deemed an elevated risk under the standards, which creates more work to become accredited. Some examples include: dividing wheat products bought in bulk such as flour, buns, and paste. As well as fresh produce from community gardens
- The total cost of accreditation is high
- Local food banks already adhere to the Government of Alberta's food safety standards
- Monetary donations may be redirected to pay for the costs of accreditation rather than spent on acquiring food

There are substantial concerns that the unnecessary red tape of the Standards of Excellence will reduce the viability of our local food banks and result in suspension of valuable services to rural communities. Applying the same exemption received by Indigenous communities and northern food banks towards small rural food banks will help ensure the viability of future services and the longevity of the rural community.

RMA Background

RMA has no active resolutions directly related to this issue.