

## Community and People Services

Rural municipalities face unique challenges and opportunities related to funding and local delivery of health care, policing, and essential services such as broadband, education, recreation, and Family and Community Support Services (FCSS). Large geographic areas, low population densities make service delivery complex, yet rural municipalities continue to innovate to create safe and healthy communities, even as provincial approaches to funding and service delivery often fail to align with rural needs and realities. Rural municipalities deserve a strong voice in shaping how these services are funded and delivered, ensuring that investments translate into improved service levels, greater local input, and vibrant communities where people can live, work, and invest.

### What is RMA's position on the importance of community and people services?

- ◆ Delivering services in rural areas will likely look different than in urban areas. Effective rural service delivery requires creative strategies and collaboration among municipalities, the Government of Alberta, and community partners to ensure sustainability and resilience.
- ◆ Rural Albertans deserve equitable access to quality health care, with a strong local voice in how services are funded and delivered. Any changes to the health care system must support local needs, improve service availability, and build healthier, more resilient rural communities.
- ◆ Municipal contributions to policing must lead to improved service levels, faster response times, and greater local input in collaboration with policing agencies across the province. These investments should ensure that rural communities receive fair, effective, and responsive policing that reflects their unique needs and priorities.
- ◆ Reliable broadband and cell service are essential for enabling rural participation in the digital economy. Providing these services in rural and remote areas requires innovative strategies,

### Community and People in Context

- ◆ The core programming of FCSS is meant to be funded by an 80% contribution from the Government of Alberta, with the remaining 20% from the FCSS's municipality. However, many municipalities estimate their funding contributions to FCSS programming to be over 35%.
- ◆ In recent years, crime rates in rural Alberta have increased significantly. According to Statistics Canada, In 2023, rural crime rates in rural Alberta were 54% higher than in urban Alberta. In many rural areas, residents and businesses perceive crime as a crisis that significantly impacts their quality of life.

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partnerships among multiple levels of government and non-profit organizations, and private sector internet service providers.

- ◆ Essential community services such as education, recreation, Family and Community Support Services (FCSS), and health care are the backbone of rural vitality. Ensuring their availability helps sustain community well-being, attract families and businesses, and fosters long-term growth.

## Why are community and people services relevant to rural municipalities?

- ◆ Rural municipalities play a direct role in coordinating, funding, and delivering community services, often working with provincial government, agencies and local providers to ensure residents are not disadvantaged by distance or limited resources. Their involvement helps tailor solutions to local realities, ensuring that communities remain healthy and supported.
- ◆ The Government of Alberta is primarily responsible for the funding and delivery of community and people services. Due to the higher per capita costs and other challenges associated with delivering services in rural areas, rural municipalities are increasing their role in funding and delivering services that are not within their mandate to fill provincial service gaps.
- ◆ Properly funded and delivered community and people services attract businesses, families, and foster a sense of belonging. This ensures that despite geographic and population challenges, rural communities remain viable and resilient.
- ◆ Access to health care, connectivity, emergency services, and social supports are not optional extras, but are the backbone of community sustainability. Applying a rural municipal lens to planning and funding these services ensures that community infrastructure is delivered equitably, enabling rural residents to thrive.

## Who does RMA partner with to advance the rural perspective on community and people services?

- ◆ Government of Alberta: Many community services require collaboration among the Government of Alberta, the local municipality, and one or more non-profit organizations. It is critical that all organizations involved in the delivery of community services have a shared voice as to how the service is delivered within the community.
- ◆ Healthcare Organizations: RMA partners with professional organizations, such as Rural Health Professions Action Plan [RhPAP], Nurse Practitioners Association of Alberta [NPAA], and College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta [CPSA], to provide joint advocacy for the recruitment and retention of health care workers in rural areas.
- ◆ Internet Service Providers (ISPs): RMA encourages municipalities to work with ISPs to support rural broadband service development (e.g. purchasing infrastructure and allowing ISPs to service these facilities to facilitate broadband distribution to low population density areas, partnering with an ISP to share the cost of building infrastructure).
- ◆ Royal Canadian Mounted Police: RMA regularly communicates with the RCMP to pursue options for enhanced service and greater local input into policing. Emergency services, like policing, are essential to community safety and must be prioritized.

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## What are RMA's current priorities on community and people services?

### Alberta Health Restructuring

- ◇ In November 2023, the Government of Alberta and Alberta Health announced a massive restructuring of the health care system into four pillars (acute care, continuing care, primary care, and mental health and addictions). This restructuring will only be successful if there are careful considerations to the effects it will have on rural municipalities and access to care in rural communities.
- ◇ This redesign has been accompanied by a transition to a dual practice model, under which physicians can provide both privately- and publicly-funded health care. This may create service delivery risks, especially in rural areas.
- ◇ The centralization of services increases the risk of rural health services being reduced or eliminated in some areas as service level decisions could become more linked to profit generation under the change.

### Alberta Sheriffs Police Service

- ◇ The Government of Alberta has formed the Alberta Sheriffs Police Service (ASPS). Municipalities will have the option of receiving policing from the ASPS instead of through the RCMP or other local policing services. Currently, there is no information on how the ASPS will work with the RCMP to deliver policing services locally, how it will gather community input, how it will be funded, or how recruitment and retention will be handled.
- ◇ The creation of the ASPS has the potential to effect many other policing priorities in the province, like the Police Funding Model and the Provincial Police Advisory Board. RMA is continuing to advocate for a service that provides enhanced safety to communities without compromising the infrastructure already in place.

### Family and Community Support Services (FCSS)

- ◇ Legislation requires that the costs of delivering FCSS is funded by an 80% contribution from the Government of Alberta, with the remaining 20% from the municipality hosting the local FCSS service. However, the overall contribution to the entire provincial FCSS program has remained stagnant at \$100 million since 2015, with a small increase of \$5 million in 2023. Due to the rising cost of FCSS programming, many municipalities contribute more to FCSS programming than required in order to keep the services operational.
- ◇ The core mandate of FCSS is prevention. Unfortunately, FCSS programs have been expected to fill gaps in the community and provide services that go beyond their scope. FCSS programs require an increase in sustainable funding to maintain their service provision.