

Police Funding Model Survey: What We Heard

Introduction

The Police Funding Model (PFM) is set to expire on March 31, 2025. RMA expects the Government of Alberta (GOA) to conduct engagements related to the renewal of the regulation, but there is currently no information on if, how or when this will occur. When the PFM was introduced, the RMA heard concerns from members around the burden of a new cost, the lack of connection between municipal costs and service levels, and the continued limitations associated with local input into policing. Given member concerns with initial PFM development, the RMA decided to seek detailed information on member experiences and PFM perspectives. The initial step of this advocacy strategy was the release of the PFM Survey, which explores members experiences with the PFM, local provincial policing service levels, and the impact that the PFM had on local budgets. This report will share some of the key findings of the survey.

What is the PFM and why does it matter to rural municipalities?

The PFM was implemented in April 2020, when the [Police Funding Regulation](#) was introduced. The PFM redistributes responsibility for a portion of frontline policing costs from the GOA to municipalities that receive policing services through the Provincial Police Service Agreement (PPSA). Prior to 2020, the GOA contracted the RCMP to provide provincial policing and shared the cost 70% to 30% with the federal government. Between 2020 and 2024, rural municipalities have paid an increasing proportion of PPSA costs, from 10% in 2020 to 30% in 2024. When the PFM was introduced, the GOA promised it would bolster local policing input and service levels. However, these survey results show that this is not the reality of the PFM for many rural municipalities.

Methods

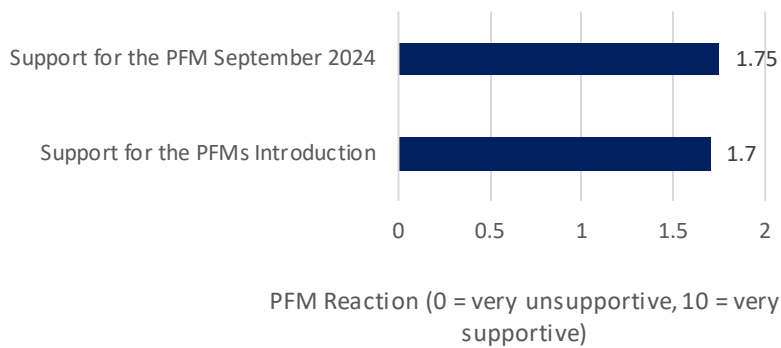
The RMA developed a 25-question survey, which was pre-tested with two rural municipalities and revised accordingly. The survey link was distributed to members on September 3, 2024 and closed on September 20, 2024. The RMA received responses from 37 rural municipalities, which is a response rate of 53.6% of all RMA members. The survey was predominantly completed by CAOs and other municipal administrators, with a similar response rate from each of the RMA's five districts. The survey explored the following research questions:

- 1) What are rural municipalities' attitudes towards and experiences of the PFM?
- 2) How has the PFM impacted rural municipal budgets?
- 3) How has the PFM changed provincial police service levels?
- 4) If the PFM continues beyond 2025, what changes would rural municipalities like to see?

Finding 1: Attitudes and Experiences

The RMA asked members questions around their understanding of the PFM, their top concerns, and to what extent they supported the PFM. The RMA found that almost all respondents considered the PFM to be the download of a provincial cost onto municipalities. The survey responses also showed that members' top concern

Table 1. Rural Municipalities Support for the PFM (n=37)

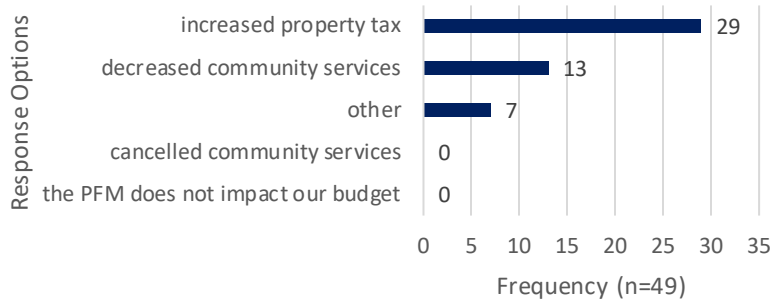


with the PFM was a greater cost for unimproved provincial police service levels, or in other words, that the GOA did not deliver on their promise to improve provincial police service levels through the PFM.

Table 1 shows the degree of support for the PFM when it was introduced and support for it at the time of the survey (fall 2024). Responding RMA members generally did not support the PFM when it was introduced, and they continued not to support the PFM at the time of the survey.

Finding 2: Budgets

Table 2. How has your municipality responded to increased costs associated with the PFM? Please select all that apply.

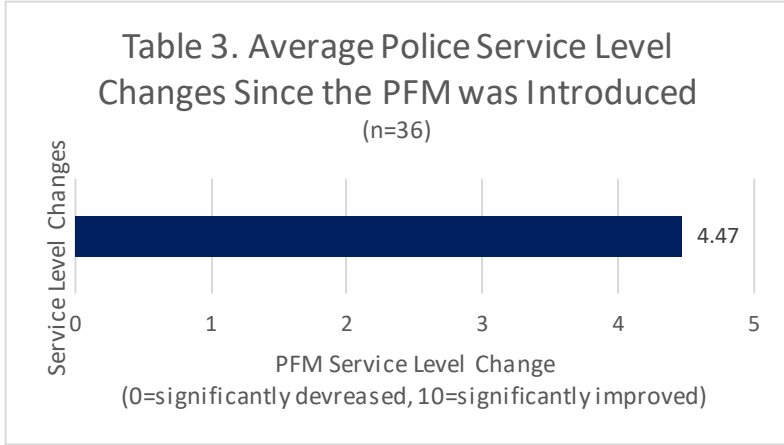


The RMA inquired how members responded to increasing PFM costs, how it impacted other policing in the community, and how they communicated this information to residents. In 2020, when the PFM was introduced and rural municipalities contributed 10% of provincial policing costs, the average respondent paid \$265,820.50. In 2024, when members contributed 30%, the average respondent paid \$851,877.00. When confronted with a new or rising cost, rural municipalities have two choices: increase property taxes or decrease

expenses. The RMA found that most survey respondents increased property taxes as opposed to decreasing community services, although some had to do both. The PFM led some members to increase their protective services budgets and/or service levels to address shortages, while others had to make cuts to protective services given what they now had to spend on provincial policing. Respondents were most likely to communicate information on the PFM cost and service levels to their residents through council meeting discussions, tax bills, and one-on-one conversations.

Finding 3: Service Levels

The RMA asked rural municipalities for the standard number of provincial police officers and detachments assigned to serve their community, and the number of provincial police positions that were currently filled at their local detachment(s). Responding rural municipalities were served by between one and six RCMP



detachments. Twenty-two rural municipalities provided information on both the expected number of provincial officers based on service standards and the current number officers serving the community. Among these members, 236 of 314 (75.2%) of all provincial positions were filled in September 2024. Based in part on this high vacancy rate, survey respondents generally found provincial police service levels to have stayed the same or decreased slightly since the PFM was introduced (Table 3).

Finding 4: PFM Changes

The RMA asked members a series of questions on how they would like to see the PFM change and for their solutions on how to improve it. Responses are summarized as follows:

- ◆ Most respondents were opposed to contributing to frontline policing costs under the PPSA, but believe that if they must pay, they should pay significantly less than the GOA. Members suggested several reasons as to why they viewed municipal contribution requirements as unjustified (Figure 1).
- ◆ If rural municipalities must pay for provincial policing, respondents want their contribution used to fund local police positions as opposed to centralized policing positions or a general policing fund. Participants thought PFM funds should be used to reduce provincial police vacancies, shorten response times, and create more local police positions.
- ◆ If the GOA determines the PFM regulation should be renewed or extended beyond March 2025, responding rural municipalities overwhelmingly believe that the PFM formula



Figure 1. Why Rural Municipalities View the PFM as Unjustified

should change. Members provided a variety of ideas on how the formula could change. However, members pointed out that any change should be carefully weighed and considered to ensure it did not have a further negative impact on rural municipalities.

- ◆ Most survey participants noted they were able to provide input into policing through regular communication with their local detachments. However, responding rural municipalities would like to see the PFM be more accountable to them as they are contributing to the provincial policing cost, and that local input was important.

Next Steps

The information gathered from this survey will be used to inform the RMA's approach to participating in the expected upcoming provincial engagement on the PFM. The RMA is continuing to engage with members on the PFM and will be spotlighting rural municipalities experiences with the PFM in greater detail.

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