

SOUTHEAST ALBERTA

VitalSigns®

Exploring issues, opportunities, and solutions



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What is Vital Signs?

Vital Signs® is a community check-up conducted by community foundations across Canada that measures the vitality of our region and identifies significant trends in a range of areas critical to quality of life. Vital Signs® is coordinated nationally by Community Foundations of Canada and conducted locally by community foundations across the country.

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Land Acknowledgement

In the spirit of respect, truth, and reciprocity, we acknowledge the many First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Peoples who have lived in and cared for these lands for generations. We are grateful for the traditional Elders and Knowledge Keepers who are still with us today and for those who have gone before us.

Welcome to the 2023 Southeast Alberta Vital Signs!



Southeast Alberta's 2023 Vital Signs provides information about seven different issue areas that influence community vitality and wellbeing throughout our region. By **exploring** each of these areas, we hope to gain a better understanding of the **challenges** and **opportunities** that exist within our communities so that we can work together to create **solutions** that will lead to a more vibrant and prosperous future for Southeast Alberta.

Methodology

In each issue area, you will find four to five indicators along with community survey responses and comments. These indicators have been sourced from Statistics Canada, local governmental entities, and local non-profit organizations, all in accordance with the standards set by the Institute for Sustainable Development, which serves as the official data partner of Community Foundations of Canada. Visit globalgoals.org for more details.

Although not all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are addressed in this report, the Community Foundation of Southeastern Alberta (CFSEA) intends to use the SDGs as an opportunity to inform and educate all residents on how they can contribute to creating a thriving community where everyone feels included.



Data sources are as current and relevant as possible, though the statistics presented in this report may have changed at the time of reading. For references, data sources, and more information, visit <https://cfsea.ca/we-inspire/vital-signs/>.

It is important to note that this report does not offer a comprehensive analysis of all potential metrics, nor does it represent the experiences of every individual and group within the region. Wherever possible, data specific to the Southeast Alberta region are presented separately. We acknowledge that there is a wide variety of differing needs and voices in the areas served. Rather than a comprehensive assessment, Southeast Alberta's 2023 Vital Signs aims to encourage dialogue. Each section includes one to two questions related to the topic. The Community Foundation of Southeastern Alberta will use this report to leverage future discussions. We invite you to engage in these conversations, share your insights, and contribute your ideas to help create a better region for all.

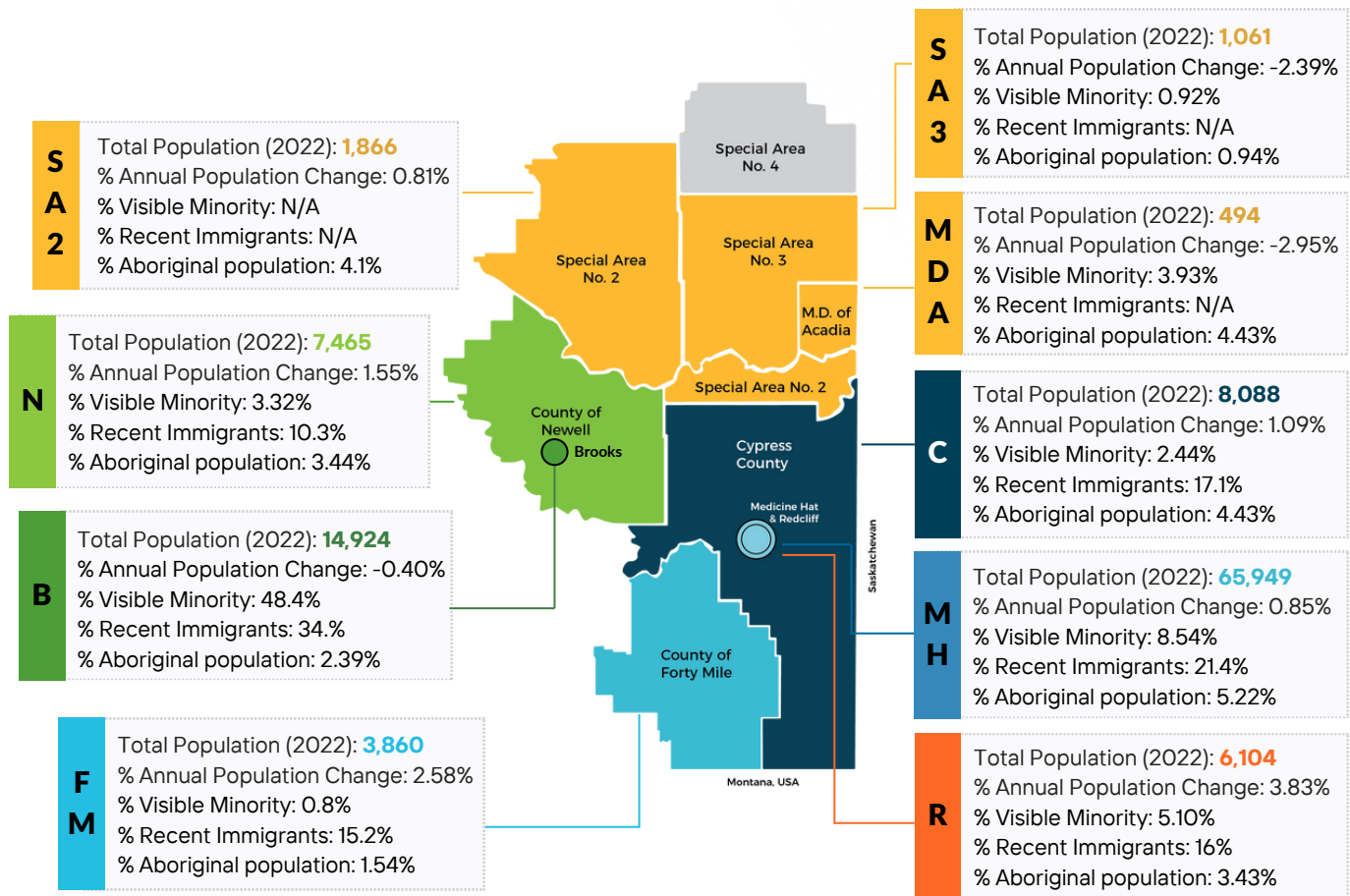
The most impactful changes will emerge through engaging with our communities in meaningful and inclusive ways.

Geographical Boundaries of this Report

The Southeast Alberta Region covers an area of 44,930 square kilometers with a population of over 109,837 residents. The boundaries stretch from the Saskatchewan border to the United States border to just north of Oyen, and west of Burdett. Brooks and Medicine Hat are the two main urban centers.

This geography is comprised of urban municipalities (including cities, towns, and villages), specialized municipalities, and rural municipalities (including municipal districts - often named as counties - improvement districts, and special areas). Southeastern Alberta also has numerous unincorporated communities (including urban service areas, hamlets, and a townsite).

The Southeast Alberta Region has a rich history and culture. Indigenous Peoples have lived in the area for thousands of years, and their traditions and heritage are still celebrated today. The region is home to a diverse population, with people from various backgrounds and cultures making their homes here and contributing to the vibrant fabric of the region. Overall, Southeast Alberta is a vibrant and diverse region that offers something for everyone. Whether you are interested in history, culture, outdoor recreation, or economic opportunities, you are sure to find it here.



Southeastern Alberta	109,837 Population (2022)	18.4% of the population is over the age of 65 (2022)	12.4% Visible Minority (2021)	4.6% Identify as Aboriginal (2021)	9.41% Non-official Language Speakers (2021)
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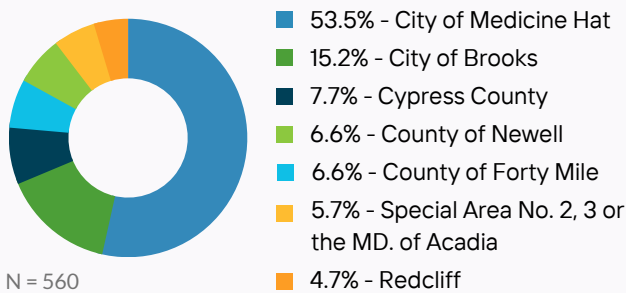
Survey Data

From July 16th to August 31st, 2023, a community survey was conducted to determine the quality of life and sense of belonging among Southeast Alberta residents. The Vital Signs community survey was promoted through social media channels, community partners, network sharing, posters, and online newsletters which garnered 580 responses. Our heartfelt appreciation goes out to all who participated in the survey.

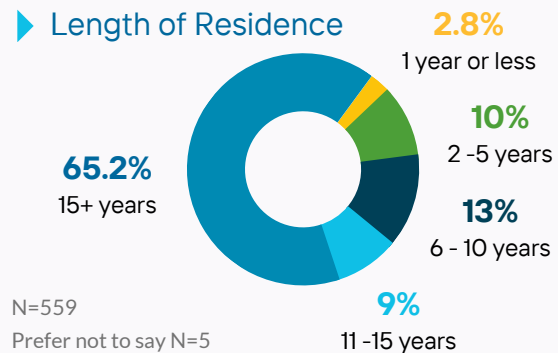
Survey results are indicated by blue boxes throughout the report. Due to the self-selected nature of the survey, this data reflects “interested citizens” and does not reflect the entire views of the Southeast Alberta region. Medicine Hat residents made up the majority, accounting for nearly 54% of the total responses. It should be noted that data reflected from the rural areas make up a small sample size. For this reason and others, the survey responses should be considered supplementary to the data.

Survey Respondent Profile

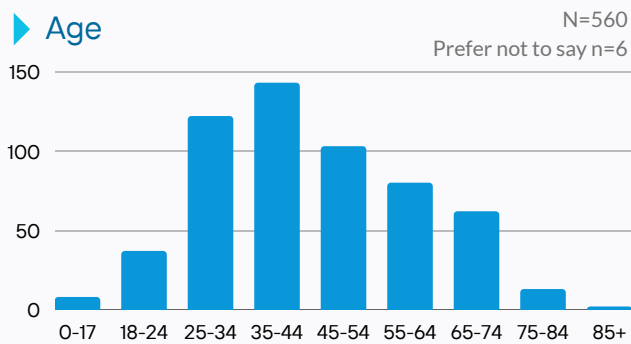
▶ Current Residence



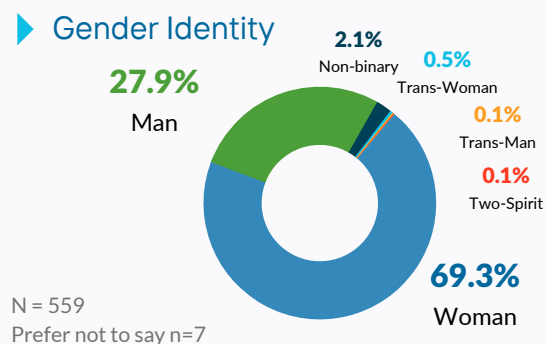
▶ Length of Residence



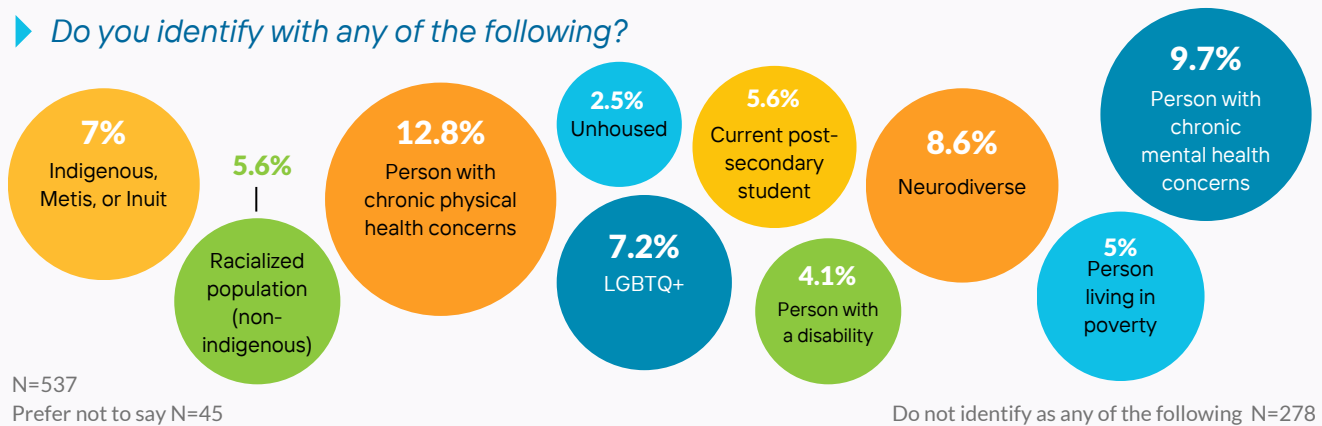
▶ Age



▶ Gender Identity



▶ Do you identify with any of the following?



Housing



Goal 11.1: Access to adequate, safe, and affordable housing for all.

Stable and affordable housing is crucial for vibrant communities, providing security and stability. A range of housing options, including emergency shelters, social housing, renting, and buying, contributes to social diversity and ensures everyone has a home. This section examines the availability, affordability, and appropriateness of resources for meeting housing needs.

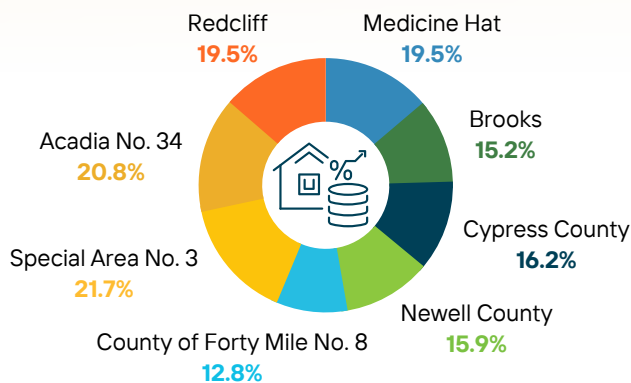
Before we take a look at this section, we encourage you to ask yourself:

- How can we as residents become more involved in addressing the housing crisis and advocating for housing stability?
- What is your perception of homelessness in the community, and how do you think it can be addressed?

Percent of Households Spending 30% or More of Income on Shelter Costs, 2021

Source: CMHC

Special Area No. 2 - N/A



The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) guidelines recommend that a healthy household budget should allocate 30% of its income to housing, including property taxes and utilities. However, recent data indicates that the rise in housing costs outpaces the increase in income. (CMHC, 2022)

Unsuitable housing: A household that does not have enough bedrooms according to the National Occupancy Standard.

Inadequate housing: A household that lives in a dwelling in need of major repairs.

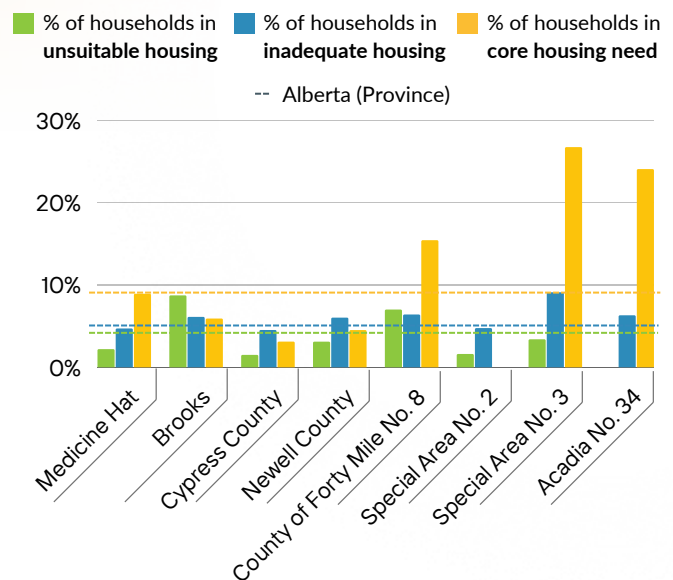
Core housing need: refers to households that fails to meet one or more standards for affordability, adequacy, or suitability, and where the household spends more than 30% of its income on housing.

Community	Median after-tax income of households, 2020
Medicine Hat	\$80,700
Brooks	\$80,000
Newell County	\$81,000
Forty Mile County No. 8	\$81,000
Special Area No. 2	\$73,000
Special Area No. 3	\$67,000
Acadia No. 34	\$69,500
Cypress County	\$88,000
Redcliff	\$73,000
Alberta (Province)	\$83,000

Source: Statistics Canada

Housing Statistics, 2021

Source: CMHC



9.9%

of Albertans were in core housing need in 2021.

Source: CMHC

The increasing cost of rent and inflation have made it difficult for people to afford suitable housing - leading to substandard living conditions that affect individuals, families, and communities at large. CFSEA survey results show that access to affordable housing has become increasingly challenging, causing many to lack optimism in finding suitable housing.

▶ "I am able to access suitable housing for my needs in my community."

69%
Strongly agree or agree

▶ "There is affordable housing for people of all income levels in my community."

22%
Strongly agree or agree

Rental Market

Source: CMHC



1.5%

Apartment vacancy rate in Medicine Hat, 2022.

\$978/month

Average Rent (\$) - 2-Bed Apt. in Medicine Hat, 2022.

Only 16% of survey respondents agreed that rental subsidies were easily accessible within their community. This finding suggests that a considerable percentage of the surveyed population may face challenges or obstacles when accessing rental subsidies in their local area.

▶ **"Rental subsidies are easily accessible in my community."** **16%**
Strongly agree or agree

Community Housing Programs

Community housing programs aim to provide safe, affordable, and stable housing options for those in need, including low-income individuals, seniors, people with disabilities, and families facing financial challenges. However, the demand for these programs often exceeds the available supply, resulting in long waiting periods for prospective tenants.



10,200

Number of households on waiting list for social or affordable housing in Alberta, 2021.

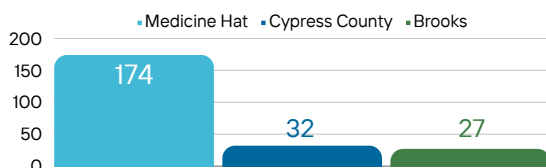
Source: Canadian Housing Survey

" We have a major housing crisis. Either it's too expensive or unsafe to live in. I'm grateful for my living situation in the Brooks Housing Society condos for the last couple of years but many are on waitlists now. Homes are becoming overcrowded because of inflation and economic changes which is effecting whole person health.

-County of Newell Resident

New Housing Constructions, 2022

Source: CMHC



Homeless and Emergency Sheltered

Individuals and families can access emergency shelters and temporary housing when facing family violence, domestic violence, or homelessness.

Beds Available

Medicine Hat Emergency Shelters (beds available)

30 Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society

30 Mustard Seed Shelter

6 McMan Roots Shelter (youth under 18)

Brooks Emergency Shelters (beds available)

21 Cantara Safe House (men, women, & children)

Medicine Hat announced the achievement of "functional zero homelessness" in June 2021, becoming the first community in Canada to end chronic homelessness, largely due to its systems planning approach.

13 people on the chronic active homeless list in Medicine Hat, March 2022.

Source: Medicine Hat Community Housing Society

70 people experiencing homelessness in Medicine Hat, 2021.

Source: Medicine Hat Community Housing Society

Homelessness is not confined to major urban centers; it also exists in rural areas. Smaller communities face unique challenges in providing support and services to homeless individuals due to limited resources and infrastructure. Survey responses express the need for community action to reduce homelessness.

▶ **"My community takes appropriate action to address homelessness."** **30%**
Strongly agree or agree

" It seems as though the work to end homelessness has ground to a halt. Now the community doesn't hear about any work happening, there is an increase in homelessness and it seems as though no one is doing anything to support people in need.

-Medicine Hat Resident

Health & Wellness



Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
Goal 3.5: Strengthen prevention and treatment of substance use problems.

One's general health status plays an important role in overall sense of vitality and well-being. Health can include both physical and mental health, as well as healthy lifestyle choices. This section focuses on exploring various aspects of health that can contribute to a person's overall well-being.

Before we take a look at this section, we encourage you to ask yourself:

- What are the most significant challenges or concerns you have experienced when it comes to accessing or receiving health care or mental health services in your community, and how do you think these challenges can be addressed or improved?



6

doctors in the South Zone accepting new patients as of October, 2023.

Source: albertafindadoctor.ca



85%

increase in visits to albertafindadoctor.ca, South Zone, 2023.

Source: albertafindadoctor.ca



19 in 10,000

Rate of physicians per 10,000 population in the South Zone, 2021.

Source: Canadian Institute for Health Information



91.1%

of the population aged 12 and over in the South Zone reported having a regular health care provider in 2020.

Source: Statistics Canada



58.1%

of the population residing in the South Zone reported having very good or excellent health in 2020. (Alberta: **63.7%**)

Source: Statistics Canada

Over the last three years, primary care access has become more challenging in Alberta, with approximately 650,000 residents without a family physician.

According to data from Alberta's Find a Doctor website – which is managed by Alberta's Primary Care Networks (PCNs) – **the number of family physicians accepting new patients via the website from 2020 to 2023 decreased by 79%. The South Zone saw an even more significant drop of 90.9%.**

“ My family is established in Brooks so we have a family doctor, however, I work with many people who do not.
 -Brooks Resident

Alberta South Zone (Health Region)

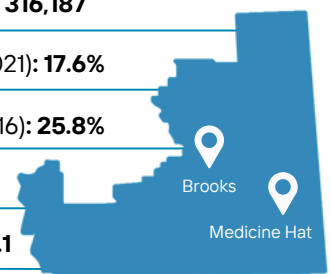
Overall Population (2022): 316,187

Seniors (65 and Older) (2021): 17.6%

Rural Area Population (2016): 25.8%

Median Age (2021): 38.8

Life Expectancy (2019): 81.1



Source: Alberta Health IDA, Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI)

The CFSEA Region is part of the **Alberta Health Services South Zone**. Much of the data used to talk about health in the region comes from data accounting for the South Zone as a whole.

78% of survey respondents have a family doctor.
12.8% identified as individuals with chronic physical health issues.

While most respondents were satisfied with their quality of life and physical health, there was a decline in agreement regarding the effectiveness of health care. This could be due to the ongoing health care crisis, which is a nationwide issue that has resulted in a lack of resources, overburdened health care systems, and a shortage of healthcare professionals.

▶ **“I am satisfied with my quality of life.”** **77%**
Strongly agree or agree

▶ **“In general, I feel physically healthy.”** **77%**
Strongly agree or agree

▶ **“I am able to receive effective health care in my community.”** **62%**
Strongly agree or agree

Mental Health

Source: Canadian Institute for Health Information

12.7% of the population in the South Zone were diagnosed with a mood disorder.

12.8% of mental health patients in the South Zone were readmitted to hospital within 30 days.

9.7% of survey respondents identified as individuals with chronic mental health concerns.

46% of Albertans reported deteriorating mental health since onset of the pandemic.

Source: Canadian Institute for Health Information

While the majority of survey participants reported good mental health (72%), there was a noticeable decline in those who felt they had access to effective mental health care (45% agree). This percentage is even lower than those who have access to effective health care (62% agree). The issue is especially pronounced in rural and remote areas, which often lack addiction treatment centers or other supports that are crucial to the delivery of mental health services.

▶ **"In general, I feel mentally healthy."** **72%**
Strongly agree or agree

▶ **"I am able to receive effective mental health services in my community."** **45%**
Strongly agree or agree

Effective mental health care involves having timely access to professionals, appropriate treatments, and access to resources and support networks. Seeking help from mental health professionals or support groups can help manage mental health conditions, but barriers such as long wait times and limited availability of services can hinder those in need, resulting in repeated access of these services which can overwhelm the system.

“ My community needs more access to mental health care. I am fortunate enough to be mentally healthy, but the amount of affordable care is minimal.

-Medicine Hat Resident

Youth Mental Health

Children and youth were profoundly impacted by pandemic disruptions. Many children who were struggling before the pandemic saw their physical and mental health worsen, and new data indicates that these issues linger.

The South Zone had the second highest rate per 100,000 population of emergency department (ED) visits for mental disorders in Alberta and the second highest for hospitalizations between 2020 to 2021.

Source: Canadian Institute for Health Information

1,381

Children and youth who visited the ED for mental disorders, South Zone, 2020–2021. (pandemic period)

491

Children and youth hospitalized for mental disorders, South Zone, 2020–2021. (pandemic period)

Opioid Crisis

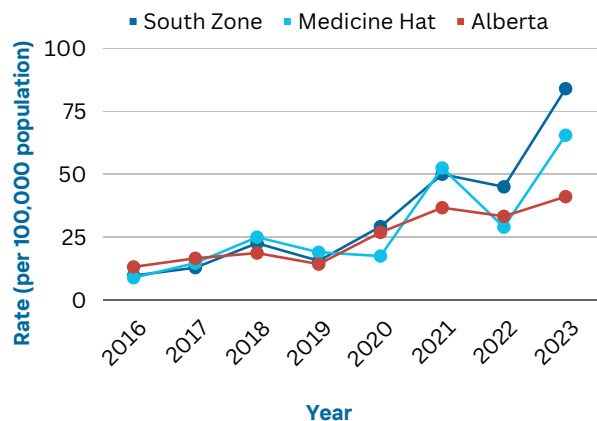
Source: Alberta Interactive Health Data Application

Opioids, including fentanyl, oxycodone, morphine, and codeine, can be legally prescribed or obtained illegally. However, both routes have the potential to result in devastating consequences such as addiction, poisoning, and even death. **Shockingly, the South Zone experienced the highest number of opioid-related deaths per 100,000 population in 2023 out of all of the health zones.**

Additionally, in 2023, **the number of drug poisoning deaths in Medicine Hat increased 35% from the previous year (20 to 27).** The graph below clearly shows the significant increase in opioid deaths in the South Zone since 2016.

Rate of drug poisoning deaths per 100,000 person by year, Alberta South Zone, 2016 to 2023

Source: Alberta Interactive Health Data Application



Work & Economy



Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.

At the heart of every thriving community lies a dynamic economy that shapes the opportunities, livelihoods, and aspirations of its residents. In this section, we will examine the current employment landscape, including factors such as unemployment rates, labour force participation, and wage trends in the Southeast Alberta Region.

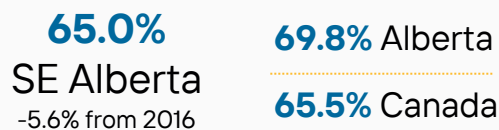
Before we take a look at this section, we encourage you to ask yourself:

- How can community members contribute to the growth and vitality of our region's economy?
- Are there many opportunities for entrepreneurship or small business development within our region?

Labour Force

Participation Source: Alberta Dashboard

The participation rate is the percentage of the population aged 15 and above who are actively seeking employment or self-employment opportunities. The Southeast Alberta region's labour force in 2022 was 52,000 people, with a participation rate of 65.0%. This represents a -5.6% decrease from 2016.



11.7% of Alberta's youth aged 15-24 were unemployed in 2022.

Source: Statistics Canada



5.0% Alberta's lowest recorded unemployment rate was in July 2022.

Source: Statistics Canada



1,329 -68% from 2020 (Pandemic Period) individuals from Southeast Alberta received Employment Insurance benefits in 2022. Source: Alberta Dashboard



53.0% (355) increase in new apprentices registered in Southeast Alberta, 2022.

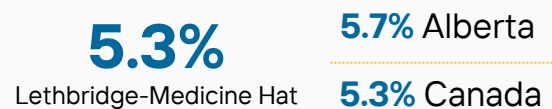
Source: Alberta Dashboard



9.0% Accommodation and food services had the highest (9.0%) job vacancy rate in Alberta in 2023. Source: Alberta Economic Dashboard

Unemployment Source: Statistics Canada

As of 2023, the unemployment rate in the Lethbridge-Medicine Hat economic region was similar to that of Alberta and Canada as a whole.



Businesses in the Region

96.6% (1-49 employees)

of businesses in Southeastern Alberta were small businesses in 2021, representing an important segment of the rural economy. Source: Alberta Dashboard

2.48%

of the total number of businesses in Alberta came from the Southeast Alberta Region, 2021. Source: Alberta Dashboard



Limited access to communications infrastructure makes attracting new business to rural Alberta challenging. Source: Economic Development in Rural Alberta Plan

Major Industries Source: Alberta Dashboard

Agriculture remains a significant economic driver in Southeast Alberta, accounting for much of the region's growth according to Census data.



11% of Alberta's cropland



12.2% of Alberta's cattle and cows



7.16% of all farms in Alberta

Living Wage

In 2022, the **Alberta Living Wage Network** calculated the living wage in Medicine Hat to be \$17.50. While this is relatively low compared to other areas in Alberta, the current minimum wage in Alberta falls short at \$15.00 per hour, making it increasingly difficult to make ends meet.

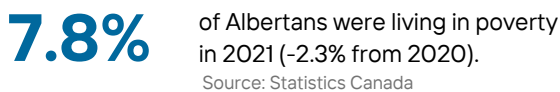


When people earn a living wage, they can afford healthier food, recreation, and can participate in their community.

Employers who commit to paying a living wage do so voluntarily and maintain their certification as new rates are calculated for their area. As of August 2023, there were 100 certified living wage employers in Alberta. Unfortunately, **Southeastern Alberta does not have any living wage employers as of October 2023.**

“Poverty reduction is also important, and establishing a basic income group or Living Wage Network here would be helpful. I recognize that entrepreneurship and supporting business can help to address this, but only if the employment provides a living wage or there are policies to ensure a basic income.”
-Medicine Hat Resident

In Alberta, a single person working full-time (assuming 40 hrs/wk) earning minimum wage would earn an annual income of **\$24,801 or \$478 per week**, after tax.



Various governments have made changes to programs meant to assist vulnerable populations, resulting in a complex system. As a result, those living below the poverty line are left with little hope of improving their situation.

“Income support is a lump sum of money but doesn't fix the problem. Easier access to showers, public bathrooms, basic necessities of life. The more in poverty you are the more denied you are.”
-Medicine Hat Resident

Many survey respondents expressed their frustration with limited employment opportunities in their area. The lack of well-paying jobs and limited career growth can be discouraging for individuals, leading them to consider leaving or not returning to Southeastern Alberta.



“Businesses in my community often post job vacancy on websites or online job sites but when you apply they don't hire you, oftentimes if you don't know anyone working at that establishment. Lots of people would like to work but no chance was given.”
-Brooks Resident

Labour Shortages Source: Statistics Canada

Statistics Canada reveals that nearly one third of the population in Southeast Alberta is over the age of 65, of that, 13% are aged between 55-65.

As older workers retire and the number of younger workers entering the labour force drops, there are fewer people available to fill job vacancies. This workforce skill gap is particularly pronounced in key industries such as healthcare, construction, and human resources.

Rural Renewal Stream

The City of Medicine Hat, along with regional partners Cypress County, County of Forty Mile, Town of Redcliff, Town of Bow Island, and the City of Brooks (including: Town of Bassano, Village of Duchess, County of Newell and Village of Rosemary) were approved as designated communities for the Rural Renewal Stream of the Alberta Advantage Immigration Program (AAIP). The Rural Renewal Stream addresses current labour needs and skill shortages in rural Alberta communities and helps newcomers settle into the community.

Connection & Belonging

(Including Leadership & Engagement)



Goal 4.7: Acquire appreciation of cultural diversity and culture's contribution to sustainable development.

Human beings have a natural yearning for connection and belonging, which plays an important role in our emotional well-being, social support, personal growth, and overall life satisfaction. Leadership can help fulfill this need, as it inspires and motivates others to work towards a shared objective. Engagement, on the other hand, describes the level of involvement we exhibit towards a particular task or activity. In this section, we will delve into the significance of these needs and how they can be nurtured within a community.

Before we take a look at this section, we encourage you to ask yourself:

- How do we make everyone feel like they belong and matter?
- What needs to happen for more people to participate in our local democracy?

Fostering a Sense of Belonging

While the 2020 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) reported that **76.3% of individuals aged 12 and over in the South Zone felt a strong sense of belonging to their local community**. Our survey results reveal that 67% of respondents feel included and connected in their community. We recognize that there may be other underrepresented groups in our communities who face challenges or barriers towards connection.

▶ "I feel included and connected in my community."

67%

Strongly agree or agree

““ Individuals with developmental/intellectual disabilities face barriers in being fully included in community life in Medicine Hat.

-Medicine Hat Resident

One way that a stronger sense of community can be achieved is through leadership and engagement opportunities. When there are opportunities for all residents to actively participate in community events and decisions, we can foster a sense of commitment and investment in the community's welfare.

Although 81% of survey participants believed that community involvement opportunities exist, several comments highlighted the desire for more opportunities tailored to the elderly and youth.

▶ "There are opportunities for community involvement in my community."

81%

Strongly agree or agree

Diversity

Another important factor in building community belonging is creating spaces and events that are inclusive and welcoming to all members of the community.

While survey respondents felt as though there were opportunities to get involved in their community, there was a drop in agreeance regarding how welcoming their community is towards new residents as well as opportunities for diverse cultures to celebrate their cultures and values. This is a concern considering the number of immigrants in the Southeast Alberta region.

▶ "My community is welcoming to new residents."

61%

Strongly agree or agree

▶ "There are opportunities for diverse groups to celebrate their cultures and values."

64%

Strongly agree or agree

Source: Statistics Canada

37.1%

Immigrant population, Brooks, AB, 2021

20.2%

Immigrant population, Forty Mile, AB, 2021

9.9%

Immigrant population, Medicine Hat, AB, 2021

““ I would really like to see us expand on free arts and culture events - especially those that invite our diverse communities to participate. We have something unique here and I don't think we're taking advantage of it.

-Brooks Resident

It's crucial that we not only acknowledge and appreciate the differences among us, but also actively work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive society.

Volunteerism

Volunteerism remains a vital and valued part of society, and efforts are made at various levels to encourage and support volunteer engagement. Small towns, in particular, rely heavily on volunteerism to sustain many of their community programs and initiatives. From organizing local events and festivals to supporting local charities and social services, volunteers play a critical role in maintaining the fabric of these communities.

69% of survey respondents either actively volunteered or generously supported charitable causes within the past year.

54% of survey respondents offered informal volunteering within the past year.

While volunteering continued during the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been changes in the ability of volunteers—of all ages—to participate in the same way as they did before.



4 in 5 Canadians aged 15 and older reported that they volunteered prior to the pandemic, either as part of an organization or on their own without the involvement of a group.

Source: Statistics Canada

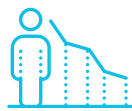
Statistics Canada's Survey on Business Conditions reports a surge in demand for volunteers in 2022:

Source: Statistics Canada



65%

of organizations have identified a shortage in volunteers.



35%

of those have had to reduce services as a result.

“ I feel there are plenty of opportunities for people to be involved in our community. However, there seems to be a lack of interest in volunteering and some organizations are struggling with an aging demographic. It would be good if there was a campaign to get younger people, including young adults to step up.

-Medicine Hat Resident

Voter Turnout

Feeling connected to one's local community can also lead to greater civic engagement and participation in community events and initiatives. Voting and participating in elections ensures that diverse perspectives are represented — contributing to a more inclusive and representative government.

Voter turnout is on a declining trend, particularly evident in municipal elections. Notably, in 2021, during the municipal elections, voter participation decreased in both Brooks-Medicine Hat and Cypress-Medicine Hat when compared to the provincial election in 2019.

Electoral District	Provincial Election 2023 Voter Turnout (%)	% change from 2019
Brooks-Medicine Hat	56.9%	-8.7%
Cypress-Medicine Hat	53.2%	-14.2%

Source: Elections Alberta

Charitable Giving

Between 2017 and 2021, charitable donors in Medicine Hat saw a decline of 22%, while in Brooks, the decrease was even more substantial at a 52%. These figures surpass the average decrease of 13% observed across Alberta during the same period.

Community	Number of donors (2021)	Median Donations (\$)
Medicine Hat	8,860 (-22% from 2016)	\$520
Brooks	1,620 (-52% from 2016)	\$610
Alberta (province)	528,270 (-16% from 2016)	\$550

Source: Statistics Canada

56

Average age of donors in Alberta (2021)

\$74,150

Median total income of donors (2021)

The average age of donors in Alberta is increasing, making it crucial to involve younger generations in charitable giving. To ensure the longevity of this vital practice, we must encourage young people to become involved in community initiatives and decision-making processes. By doing so, we can foster their participation and ensure that charitable giving remains a vital part of society in the years to come.

Creative & Active Living

Choosing to lead an active and creative lifestyle is more than just a personal preference – it is a crucial part of individual well-being. By promoting and facilitating opportunities for people to engage in these activities, we not only benefit ourselves, but also the wider community. These activities create a platform for people from diverse backgrounds to come together, foster relationships, and feel represented in public spaces.

Before we take a look at this section, we encourage you to ask yourself:

- What motivates you to engage in creative and active pursuits?
- What obstacles or challenges do you face when trying to be more creative or physically active?

COVID-19 Impact

The pandemic has highlighted the significance of active and creative living for both physical and mental wellness and has resulted in a permanent shift in people's attitudes towards these areas. As we approach 2024, the demand for such opportunities is higher than ever.

The Canadian Tire Jumpstart State of Sport Report reveals that **since March 2021, sports organizations in Canada have experienced an average financial loss of almost \$132,000 or 30% of their operating budget.**

Jumpstart State of Sport Report

81% of sports organizations say that the cost to run programming and operations has risen.

44% of parents say they cannot afford to register their children for organized sports.

Source: Canadian Tire Jumpstart

Barriers to Recreation Participation

Major barriers to participation in recreational activities, as Identified by the Alberta Recreation & Parks Association:

Source: Alberta Recreation Survey Report 2022



35%

Equipment costs



21%

registration or admission costs

▶ "My community's artistic, cultural, and recreational activities are accessible and affordable."

58%

Strongly agree or agree

Recreation Fee Assistance

Recreational activities can be costly, which makes it difficult for many individuals to participate. Fortunately, there are organizations, programs, and initiatives that offer recreational subsidies to families and individuals. KidSport's 'So ALL Kids Can Play!' Grant Program is one such assistance program. In 2022, KidSport supported the communities of Medicine Hat, Redcliff, and Hanna by providing funding for:

246
\$60,423

Children

In Medicine Hat and Redcliff
(KidSport Alberta Annual Report 2022)

24
\$4,893

Children

In Hanna
(KidSport Alberta Annual Report 2022)

Active Communities

Leisure activities extend beyond sports, and can be challenging to measure. The Canadian Health survey discovered that almost half of adults in the South Zone engage in an average of 2.5 hours of exercise per week, while 56% of children participate in physical activity for at least an hour every day. It's crucial to have accessible spaces and opportunities for recreation, as 80% of survey respondents felt they had sufficient chances to participate in these activities. Source: Statistics Canada

49%

of adults exercise, on average, 2.5 hours per week.

56%

of youth aged 12-17 have at least 1 hour of physical activity every day.

▶ "There are opportunities to participate in fitness activities/organized sports."

80%

Strongly agree or agree

Cultural Activities

In 2023, Alberta Culture Days were commemorated in Medicine Hat and Brooks with a range of events honouring the region's history and traditions. The events showcased the rich and vibrant cultural legacy of both cities, leaving residents and visitors eager for more celebrations in the future.

Despite these efforts, it is important to note that smaller communities in the region may have fewer opportunities for cultural activities. This highlights the need for continued support and investment in cultural initiatives across all communities in Alberta, to ensure that every person has the opportunity to celebrate their heritage and be part of a vibrant and diverse society.

▶ "My community offers a diverse range of arts and cultural activities."
70%
Strongly agree or agree



In the last year, a significant 82% of survey respondents attended an arts event, visited their local library, visited a local museum, attended a cultural event, or attended an event organized by an Indigenous group.

82%

“ Retaining people with wider career and recreation/cultural opportunities will allow the community to support the professionals, amenities, and services of the city.

-Brooks Resident

Libraries

Libraries are an essential resource in our communities, offering access to a vast array of information, promoting literacy, and encouraging inclusivity. **56% of survey respondents visited a library in the past year.**

Southeast Alberta is home to two of seven library systems in Alberta; the Shortgrass Library System and the Marigold Library System. Based on their annual statistics, both library systems experienced an increase in programming utilization and visits in 2022.

↑ 70%
 increase in adult programs
 (Medicine Hat Public Library)

➔ 102

↑ 76.5%
 increase in visits from 2021
 (Medicine Hat Public Library)

➔ 134,783



of the workforce in Southeastern Alberta are employed in the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector, 2021.

The Alberta Recreation & Parks Association 2022 survey identified walking for pleasure, hiking, doing a craft or hobby, and attending a fair, festival, or cultural event as the top recreational activities among Albertans.



99% of Albertans believe recreation and parks improve their quality of life.
 (Alberta Recreation Survey Report 2022)

Parks, trails, and community centers provide opportunities for creative and recreational activities. In fact, many survey respondents expressed their love for these public spaces, particularly parks and trails.

“ Having access to golf course, arenas, and swimming pools is very important in a small community in order to absorb large groups of immigrants, who are desperately needed to keep our small community vibrant and to keep businesses running successfully.

-County of Forty Mile Resident

Recreational centers are a huge part of a community, especially in small towns. They serve as a hub for social interactions, physical activities, and cultural events. Recreational centers can offer a variety of programs and facilities, such as sports leagues, fitness classes, art workshops, and community gatherings. These spaces are not only important for individuals to maintain their physical and mental wellbeing but also for fostering a sense of belonging and togetherness among community members.

“ My community does an amazing job getting teenagers involved in the community, including free rec passes. My community also puts on many cultural events.

-County of Newell Resident

Public Safety



Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies, accountable institutions, and access to justice for all.

In a secure community, individuals can go about their everyday lives without worrying about threats to themselves, their families, or their belongings. A secure community is one where the residents feel at ease and comfortable in their surroundings. In such a community, people can walk around at night without fearing for their safety, children can play outside without any worries, and homeowners can leave their homes without the fear of being robbed. In this section, we explore the key elements that contribute to creating a secure community.

Before we take a look at this section, we encourage you to ask yourself:

- What types of crimes or safety issues do you think are most prevalent in your community?
- What prevention measures or strategies would you like to see implemented to address these issues?

Crime Severity Index

The Crime Severity Index (CSI), which measures the volume and the seriousness of crimes, saw an annual increase in the municipalities of Medicine Hat (+3.17%), Redcliff (+20.64%) and Brooks (+12.31%) in 2022.

Crime is an unfortunate reality in our society, and while there is no way to completely eliminate it, it is crucial for law enforcement, policymakers, and community leaders to work together to identify the root causes of crime and develop effective solutions to keep our communities safe.

Violent Crimes Against People

According to the Medicine Hat Police Service's annual report, there was a 58.8% rise in threats and harassment incidents in 2022 compared to the previous year.

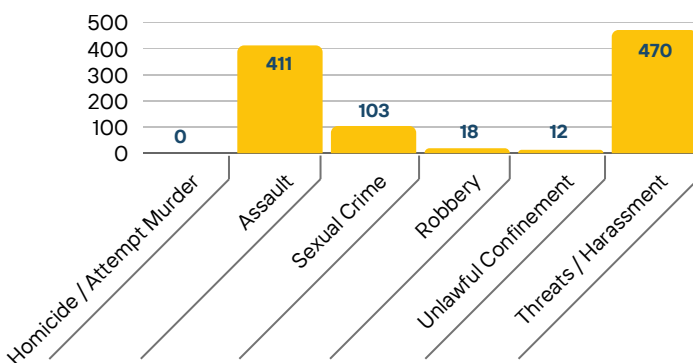
Crime Severity Index, Police Services in Alberta, 2022

Source: Statistics Canada



Medicine Hat Police Service, 2022

Source: MHPS Records Management System



Calls for Service

11%

The Medicine Hat Police Service saw an 11% increase in service calls from 2021 to 2022.

Source: MHPS Records Management System

Although 78% of survey respondents reported feeling secure in their community, there was a decrease in satisfaction with regards to crime prevention and emergency situation strategies among respondents.

▶ "I feel safe where I live, work, and play."

78%

Strongly agree or agree

▶ "There are effective crime prevention strategies in my community."

45%

Strongly agree or agree

▶ "My community is well-prepared for emergency situations."

51%

Strongly agree or agree

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a widespread issue that affects millions of people worldwide, and it comes in various forms, such as physical, emotional, sexual, and financial abuse.

According to the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, in 2022, the South Zone of Alberta registered with the second-highest admission rate to emergency shelters in the province (1,421).

Southern Alberta
admissions of adults and children

- Emergency **1,421**
- Second Stage **20**

Source: Alberta Council of Women's Shelters

The Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society (MHWSS) offers services to those affected by family violence in Medicine Hat and surrounding areas, including Bow Island, Redcliff, Oyen, Seven Persons, Irvine, and Manyberries.

The Safe Families Intervention Team (SFIT) is a partnership between the Medicine Hat Police Service (MHPS) and the Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society. The SFIT works alongside support agencies to offer a collaborative response to families dealing with domestic violence. In 2022, there was a minor decline in reported incidents compared to 2021. Specifically, in 2022, there were **1,589 domestic violence files, 323 charges, and 1,115 referrals.**

▶ **"Have you experienced violence within your home in the last 12 months?"** (Including domestic, sexual, financial, and emotional) **9%** Strongly agree or agree

▶ **"Have you witnessed violence within your home in the last 12 months?"** (Including domestic, sexual, financial, and emotional) **12%** Strongly agree or agree

According to the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey by Statistics Canada, intimate partner violence is nearly twice as common in rural areas as it is in urban areas. **In 2021, there were 545 victims per 100,000 people aged 12 and above in rural areas, compared to 296 victims in urban areas of Canada.**

Source: Statistics Canada

Racism and Discrimination

Racism and discrimination are still prevalent issues in our society today. Despite the progress that has been made towards equality, many individuals still face unfair treatment based on their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other personal characteristics. 58% of respondents felt as though racism and discrimination exist in their community.

▶ **"There is racism/discrimination in my community."** **58%** Strongly agree or agree

“ I am concerned as a community member about the discrimination against 2SLGBTQIA individuals and those of different cultural backgrounds.
 -Medicine Hat Resident

Hate crimes are examples of discrimination that target visible aspects of an individual's identity, with the potential to impact not only the person but also the broader community. According to Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, the number of hate crimes in Canada increased by 27% between 2021 and 2022. Race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation were the primary motivators for these hate crimes.

15.3% increase in police-reported hate crime rates, 2020-2021 (Alberta)
 Source: Statistics Canada

“ We are taking steps in the right direction, but there are so many things that desperately need to be addressed. For example, racism, ableism, sexism and classism are rampant in this province and especially in our city, are taken in stride or 'that's just how people are here' and it's very disappointing.
 -Medicine Hat Resident

Public Safety Initiatives

Public safety is a collective responsibility. It requires the efforts of government, law enforcement, community organizations, and individuals to work together to create and maintain safe and healthy communities. By investing in public safety initiatives, we can help to create a better future for ourselves and for future generations.

Food Security



Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security, and promote sustainable agriculture.

Food security is not merely about having access to sustenance; it encompasses the fundamental assurance that everyone, regardless of their circumstances, can consistently access safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food. Our community is made up of individuals from a variety of backgrounds, each with their own unique stories and experiences. In this section, we will look into the complex issue of food security within our communities.

Before we take a look at this section, we encourage you to ask yourself:

- How do you think food insecurity is perceived in your community, and what can be done to reduce any associated stigma?

What is Food Insecurity?

Food insecurity in Canada refers to the inability to access nutritious food in socially acceptable ways, affecting individuals and families from all backgrounds. According to the Food Banks Canada HungerCount report, in 2022:

Source: Food Banks Canada



1 in 5 Albertans are experiencing food insecurity.



Alberta's food banks saw a **73% increase in use** from 2019 to 2022.

These statistics mirror the challenges faced by communities throughout Alberta. The HungerCount report found that Alberta has the highest prevalence of food insecurity among all 10 Canadian provinces. Tens of thousands of Albertans now depend on food banks for essential support, placing immense pressure on these organizations.

Community Food Banks

Southeast Alberta has five food banks. These include the Medicine Hat and District Food Bank (Root Cellar Food and Wellness Hub), the Brooks Food Bank Foundation, the County of Forty-Mile Food Bank, the Hanna Food Bank, and the Oyen Food Bank. These non-profits, usually led by an amazing team of staff and/or volunteers, rely on generous donations to keep their shelves well-stocked. Data shows that more and more people are turning to these food banks for help.

Households served in 2022:

11,227

Medicine Hat and District Food Bank
(+21% from 2021)

772

Brooks Food Bank Foundation
(+47% from 2021)

122

Hanna Food Bank

Rising Food Prices

Food prices have been steadily rising due to a range of factors, creating upward pressure on costs throughout the food supply chain. The COVID-19 pandemic played a significant role in grocery store prices, causing disruptions in the supply chain, labour shortages, and changes in consumer purchasing habits. Additionally, poor weather conditions in some growing regions have also contributed to this issue. Source: Statistics Canada

Grocery Affordability

In 2023, the federal government provided around 11 million Canadians with lower and moderate incomes a deposit as part of the grocery rebate program. Those with household incomes of \$38,000 or less and individuals earning \$32,000 or less were eligible to receive rebates of up to \$467 and \$234, respectively. Seniors were also eligible and typically received an average rebate of \$225.



I currently can afford adequate and nutritious food, but it is becoming more difficult as food prices skyrocket.

-Medicine Hat Resident

While nearly **3 in 4** survey participants indicated they could afford an adequate and nutritious household diet, the percentage of those who agreed in the accessibility of food security programs dropped to just over 50%.

▶ **"My household can afford an adequate amount of nutritious food."**

73%

Strongly agree or agree

▶ **"There are adequate opportunities in my community to access programs addressing food security."**

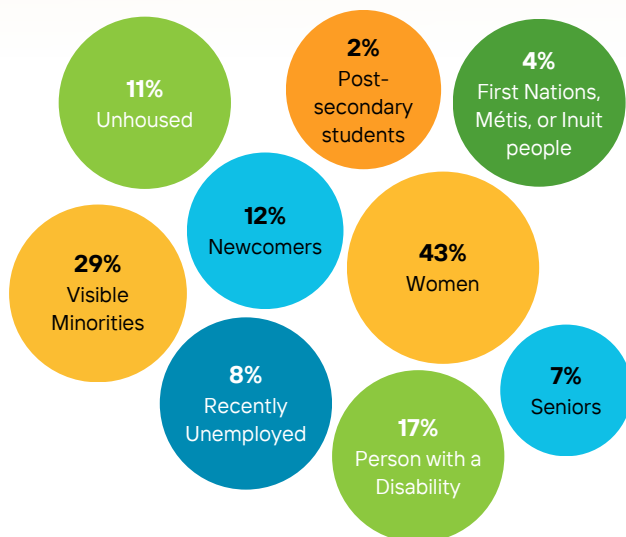
54%

Strongly agree or agree

Who is at a higher risk of experiencing household food insecurity?

Contrary to popular belief, accessing food security services is not limited to those living in poverty. Unexpected life events, such as illness or job loss, can quickly drain savings and leave individuals struggling financially. With inflation and rental rates on the rise, the situation has become even more challenging.

Food insecurity can impact people from all backgrounds, but specific populations are more susceptible to household food insecurity than others. According to the Brooks Food Bank, the following groups required special attention in 2022:



The Levels of Food Security

- 1 - Food secure:** No indication of difficulty with income-related food access;
- 2 - Marginally food insecure:** Exactly one indication of difficulty with income-related food access;
- 3 - Moderately food insecure:** Indication of compromise in quality and/or quantity of food consumed;
- 4 - Severely food insecure:** Indication of reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns;
- 5 - Food insecure:** Includes marginal, moderate and severe food insecurity.



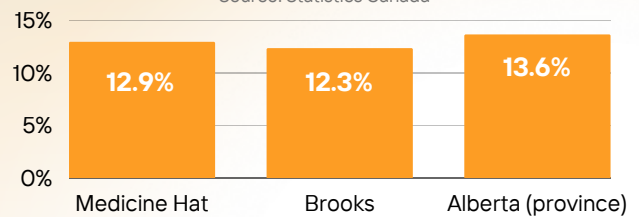
6.3%

of Albertans were living in severe food insecurity in 2021 (+1.2% from 2020).

Source: Statistics Canada

Low-income Households

Source: Statistics Canada



Low-income cut-offs (LICO) are income thresholds below which a family will devote a larger share of its income on the necessities of food, shelter, and clothing than the average family.

The year 2021 saw a significant surge in low-income households in Medicine Hat, with 9,870 families (12.9%) facing financial difficulties. This is the highest figure since 2003. Brooks followed closely with 2,360 families (12.3%). Among these families, lone-parent households with at least one child accounted for the largest proportion of families living in low-income.



About **1 in 3** lone-parent households in Medicine Hat and Brooks were living in low-income, 2021.

Source: Statistics Canada

Living with a low-income can be a major stressor and make it difficult to afford basic necessities such as rent, transportation, and food.

“ Food provision needs to improve for compromised people in the area. Ways to use fresh produce, or apply pressure for food-wasting policies to be changed.

-Special Areas Resident

“There are adequate opportunities to buy locally produced food year-round in my community.”

70%

Strongly agree or agree

“Medicine Hat (and area) has a rich and productive agriculture sector that contributes greatly to our regions’ social, environmental, and economic development. We are well-positioned to add agri-food processing as part of our value-add proposition to feed a hungry world.”

-Nichole Neubauer with the Agricultural Discover Centre.



I love the access to greenhouse produce and the low cost.

-Medicine Hat Resident



What Issue Will You Take On?

With Thanks

Our heartfelt appreciation goes out to all of the individuals and organizations who helped create our report. We extend our thanks to those who provided data, took part in our survey, and our sponsors whose generosity made the report's production possible.

To learn how you can contribute to our vibrant community, please contact the Community Foundation of Southeastern Alberta.

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