



# WHAT ALBERTANS REALLY WANT

AN ALBERTA NDP BUDGET PROPOSAL



February 27, 2025



## What Albertans Really Want

Albertans are Alberta's real advantage—driving the economy, attracting investment, and delivering services. We can learn from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples, who understand that the environment, economy, and communities are interconnected.

Too many Albertans struggle to make ends meet. Costs have risen, but wages have not kept pace. Young Albertans face challenges securing well-paying jobs, while rising costs for essentials like insurance, gas, housing, and food add to financial strain. A government that fails to prioritize Albertans' needs and ignores their duty to uphold fiscal responsibility—through actions such as signing bloated contracts—has made this all worse.

Albertans are also deeply concerned about our relationship with the U.S. and its economic impact. Tariffs threaten jobs and key industries, including oil and gas, agriculture, manufacturing, and forestry. Alberta, with the highest percentage of its economy tied to U.S. exports, needs a clear plan—not submission to American demands. We must prioritize local industries and diversify markets, products, and sectors to secure our future.

Albertans want a province where everyone thrives, earns a living wage, and has access to quality education and health care. But the UCP has failed to address these priorities—cutting support for housing, persons with disabilities, and educational workers, while interfering in pension investments and refusing to back down from plans to exit the Canada Pension Plan. The political interference and corruption at the heart of the CorruptCare scandal underscores their disregard for ethical, competent governance.

The UCP government's approach has also hurt municipalities. Cuts to grant programs and policies allowing oil and gas companies to avoid property taxes have left local governments shortchanged by hundreds of millions of dollars. Meanwhile, reckless environmental policies—like reopening the Eastern Slopes to coal mining—threaten our water, agriculture and valuable export industries.

Albertans want strategic investments that save public dollars long-term. Underfunded public services have led to ER closures, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate health care. A pragmatic, fiscally responsible government—like those of Roy Romanow and Gary Doer—would prioritize investments in health care and education, rather than the waste that has characterized this UCP government.

Our New Democrat Caucus asked Albertans what their priorities are. This document reflects what they really want to see their provincial government deliver for them. In Budget 2025, we need a new approach.

**Court Ellingson**

Alberta New Democrat Caucus Shadow Minister of Finance

## Budget Priorities

Alberta's New Democrat Caucus has been listening to Albertans—at their doors, at events, at roundtables and town halls—on what the provincial budget priorities should be. Albertans have shared their priorities for a prosperous economy, efficient and reliable public services, a fiscally responsible government, and greater certainty that they and their families will thrive both today and in the future.

After hearing from thousands of Albertans, we identified five priorities for targeted investments by the UCP government in the 2025 provincial budget.

1. Jobs and Economy
2. Affordability
3. Healthcare
4. Education
5. Public Safety

Strategic investments in these areas will best serve Albertans as we manage the uncertainty arising from the threat of tariffs, trade wars and rising global tensions. Through investing in these priorities, the government has the opportunity to build confidence in Alberta's role as a leader in Canada."

At the same time, the UCP's wasteful spending on pet projects and appeals to their insiders have cost Albertans money that could have been spent on other priorities. Our New Democrat Caucus would prioritize ending this waste and making fiscally responsible investments in the public services Albertans rely on.

### Jobs and Economy

A thriving Alberta economy should always put people and good jobs first. Albertans told us the economy must be diverse, inclusive and equitable so that everyone has the ability to contribute and benefit from Alberta's prosperity.

Despite several years of strong resource prices, the threats to Alberta are significant because the UCP has squandered opportunities. The provincial government has not prepared our industries for the serious threat of tariffs, the uncertain global economy, and fluctuating commodity prices. Despite the strength of the energy sector, Alberta's unemployment is above the Canadian average and Alberta is the only province experiencing a decline in real wages. Albertans are asking themselves, 'what happened to the Alberta Advantage?' In addition to stagnant wages, Alberta under the UCP has the highest inflation in the country. Albertans feel it in their paycheques, their auto insurance rates and their electricity bills.

The increasing uncertainty investors and families are experiencing has been made worse by the UCP government. From the Sovereignty Act, the banning of renewable investments, and the arbitrary cancellation of Calgary's Green Line to the catering to extreme interests by Danielle Smith and the UCP, it's hard for investors to feel confident in Alberta.

We need immediate action. Alberta's New Democrats see the upcoming budget as an opportunity for the province to invest in key industries and shelter our province from worst-case scenarios. The budget must clearly invest in a responsible, credible path forward that leads to economic stability and investments in the public services that ensure everyone can thrive.

Albertans have told us in the budget they want to see investments made in the following areas:

1. **Support a Team Canada approach to stand up to the Trump administration.** Albertans deserve responsible, respected leadership that will work with Premiers and the Prime Minister to remove interprovincial trade barriers that hamper economic growth. According to Statistics Canada, interprovincial trade barriers are costing Canadians an extra 7 per cent for many common goods. Instead of standing alone, Alberta must tackle our biggest problems by being part of a team. This will ensure Canada can build major infrastructure across the country, from critical minerals and transmission lines to pipelines and LNG projects, all of which can benefit Alberta's economy. The budget must also have a much stronger commitment to sourcing made-in-Alberta products and supporting local businesses, especially in transparent and competitive government procurement.
2. **Support a strong oil and gas sector.** Alberta's oil and gas industry, including the oil sands, remains the cornerstone of Alberta's economy and generates one quarter of Alberta Government revenues. It was the work of Alberta's New Democrats in government that got the Trans Mountain expansion built. The value-added opportunities for jobs and investment in our petrochemical industries are enormous. Now is the time for critical infrastructure to support the resiliency of our energy industry, especially in the face of tariffs from our largest export market.
3. **Prioritize clean technologies and affordable electricity.** Thanks to the policy work of Alberta's New Democrats in government, Alberta was leading the nation in investment in renewables and work to address climate change. This budget must reestablish Alberta's role as a renewables powerhouse, driving down electricity costs, strengthening interjurisdictional connectivity and developing innovative approaches to storage solutions. This will ensure our province is ready for the future and can secure good jobs, billions in investments, and create resiliency in demand for our energy products.
4. **Continue the drive toward diversification.** Alberta needs to continue to diversify both our domestic output and our access to export markets. Investing in value added keeps jobs in Alberta while increasing the value of exports. Countless opportunities exist in agriculture, technology, construction, manufacturing, forestry and petrochemical sectors—the government just needs to ensure these opportunities don't pass us by. More opportunities for Indigenous communities to be part of a growing, diverse economy should be encouraged and nurtured.
5. **Develop opportunities in critical minerals.** Alberta has significant deposits of critical minerals that can play a massive role in the future of our province. Rather than chasing outdated coal projects, Alberta is well-positioned to attract billions in critical minerals mining investment and be at the forefront of innovation in industries ranging from aerospace and IT to energy and health. To take full advantage of these opportunities, we need to invest in geoscience research to better understand our mineral resources, as

well as focus on ensuring our regulatory and fiscal environment promotes Indigenous and community engagement.

6. **Invest in our people.** Albertans are the Alberta Advantage. We need to invest in all levels of education, invest in workers to build their skills, and invest in parents by providing access to affordable daycare. It is time to raise the minimum wage so we no longer have the lowest in the country, and it is time to stop punishing people who are on income support when they secure employment. From child care to rural broadband to public transportation, we need to ensure Albertans across the province have the ability to productively participate in a thriving economy.

## Affordability

For years, Albertans have been struggling through an affordability crisis. Alberta under the UCP government had the second highest inflation in Canada in January 2025, which contributed to declining real wages. While the UCP has been in power, rent has skyrocketed, particularly in the province's two largest cities. This government has also sat back while electricity bills and auto insurance rates have increased at an unprecedented rate. The government contributed to ballooning costs by removing the cap on utilities and increased the rate at which insurance companies can raise auto insurance premiums.

They have defunded crucial social supports while undermining others, such as AISH, through deindexation. They have allowed our minimum wage to slip from the highest in the country to the lowest. As a result, the UCP is making life more expensive for Albertans.

This cannot be the path forward if our province is to maintain the Alberta Advantage. Albertans need to know that their government will support them when times are tough, and they've made it clear that in the budget they want to see changes made in the following areas:

1. **Index tax brackets, social benefits, and minimum wage to CPI.** As our province deals with persistently high inflation, the UCP's move to deindex tax brackets and benefits from CPI will cost Albertans millions of dollars. Workers earning the stagnant minimum wage have seen their purchasing power drop significantly since 2019. Albertans on fixed income need to be reassured that they won't fall behind. Personal income tax brackets must be fully re-indexed to inflation, rather than any arbitrary number picked by the UCP, so that bracket creep stops eroding Albertans' hard-earned wages.
2. **Make auto insurance more affordable.** Drivers in Alberta pay some of the highest auto insurance premiums in the country. The UCP's proposed changes to auto insurance will allow insurance companies to grow their profit from good drivers, who will see their premiums climb another 15 per cent over the next two years. Should drivers change insurance providers, they may see an even higher increase. The government needs to start putting Albertans first, not the profits of insurance companies.
3. **Protect Albertans' pensions.** This means ensuring Albertans have a reliable pension when they retire. The majority of Albertans have been clear: hands off their CPP. The government should stop wasting money by pushing their unpopular Alberta Pension

Plan and instead commit to staying in the Canada Pension Plan. At a time of immense economic uncertainty, it's reckless to play with Albertans' retirement income.

4. **Ensure all Albertans have an affordable place to call home.** Housing is a fundamental need of all people in our province. Homelessness in Edmonton has more than tripled under the UCP, 1 in 8 Edmonton households are in core housing need, and 115,000 Calgarians are at risk of becoming homeless. To end the housing crisis in Alberta, robust investments along the full spectrum of housing are needed. This includes affordable housing with wrap around supports, mixed market housing, and market options. Albertans need the UCP to stop picking fights about housing with the federal government and municipalities. They need the UCP to pick up shovels and get to work.
5. **Recognize the basic needs of a productive workforce.** At the end of the day, Alberta cannot expect to have a productive workforce if its workers are struggling to make ends meet. This government should acknowledge that strong unions help build stronger communities. Workers need to have a place to live, food on the table, and a belief that better is possible. Ensuring that people's basic needs are met will help us make it through the affordability crisis together while simultaneously increasing productivity in a fast growing province.

## Healthcare

The UCP has failed to deliver on their promise to Albertans to “fix health care.” Albertans wait for health care at every point in the system. They wait to find a doctor, they wait in emergency departments, they wait for surgeries, and they wait for continuing care. These months of waiting are months of pain. The health of Albertans deteriorates when they are stuck on preventable waitlists. Even worse, diagnoses can become catastrophic as a result. This is not the health care system of a wealthy province—this is the healthcare system of a UCP government who does not care about bettering the lives of Albertans.

Today, nearly 5 million people call Alberta home, but close to a million Albertans still do not have a regular family doctor. This means Albertans have been forced to rely on emergency departments and urgent care centres. Worryingly, 25 per cent of First Nations and Métis families living in Alberta do not have a family doctor compared to 18.6 per cent of non-Indigenous Albertans.

Emergency room wait times have reached unacceptable levels. In some parts of the province, emergency rooms are even witnessing rolling closures due to staffing shortages and inadequate support. Surgical wait times are no better off, increasing from 28 weeks in 2019 to 38.4 weeks in 2024.

Albertans have unbelievable stories from the continuing care system. Some have died on waitlists for cancer diagnostics, and others have died waiting for essential surgeries. Rather than addressing these crises, the UCP delivered chaos and confusion for patients, their families, and health care providers as they forced through a rapid restructuring of Alberta's health care system without a well-thought out implementation plan.

What our province needs and what Albertans deserve are robust strategic investments in public healthcare. Albertans told us they want to see budget investments in the following areas:

1. **End Corrupt Care.** We need an independent judicial-led public inquiry to root out the truth. With allegations that hundreds of millions of dollars have been wasted on bloated contracts, waste and corruption must end. We need an immediate moratorium on further private surgical contracts. Albertans deserve to know whether inappropriate influence was used on AHS staff to approve procurement contracts with friends of elected officials or their political staff. Bloated contracts mean precious funds for health care are being wasted and this cannot continue.
2. **Build a strong public health care system.** Countless efforts to privatize Alberta's health care system led to higher costs and poorer service. Government now needs to commit to investing in a public system that provides Albertans access to sustainable health care that meets their primary and acute care needs where they live. First Nations and Métis peoples, as well as Albertans living in rural and small to mid-sized communities deserve access to cancer treatments, maternal care, reproductive health services, kidney dialysis and a regular family doctor or nurse practitioner. Albertans told us that the 2025 budget needs to reverse the chronic under-investment in Alberta's public health care system.
3. **Provide every Albertan access to a family doctor.** Albertans wait over an hour on average at a walk-in clinic to see a doctor. It's even longer in Red Deer and Grande Prairie where patients wait an average of 72 minutes in the waiting room to see a physician. Albertans need timely access to family doctors, and family physicians in Alberta need to feel valued and supported by the government for their work, so that they chose to stay and practice in our province. Alberta needs to integrate physician recruitment with quicker recognition of international medical or health care qualifications; remove barriers to nurse practitioners and pharmacists using their full scope of practice; and increase the number of Alberta-raised health care professionals.
4. **Give seniors a life of dignity.** Alberta seniors have spent their lives shaping the province into what it is today. They deserve to live in comfort surrounded by their loved ones. Alberta seniors must have options. They should have access to services that help them age in place and they should have full faith that seniors care facilities in our province will be safe and comfortable places to call home. Too often we hear horror stories about the treatment of seniors in care because of the UCP's lack of investment. Seniors deserve better. They deserve respect and anything less is shameful. The spirit that built Alberta remains strong in seniors who today expect home and continuing care to help them live independently for as long as possible.
5. **Prioritize strategic R&D investment.** Increased investment that leverages innovative health research and development will significantly grow Alberta's current pharmaceutical and biotechnology sector. The application of AI and emerging technologies in health care is already underway. The University of Alberta SCANAID project is showing how to use AI efficiently for earlier and more accurate diagnosis and treatment. This eliminates the associated costs of multiple surgeries, prolonged hospitalizations, and life-long cardiac follow-ups, and frees up public funds. This simple example demonstrates the

potential for transforming health care delivery. Albertans will benefit from world class health care, and from a prosperous pharmaceutical, biotech, AI and health technology sector.

## Education

Like with health care, Albertans from all walks of life have told us in no uncertain terms that they support a strong public education system. We've heard countless stories of overcrowded classrooms, increases in classroom complexity, and a lack of support for students, all of which are causing students and teachers to struggle unnecessarily.

Due to the UCP's underfunding of education alongside record population growth, Alberta desperately needs more schools. These school capital builds must be publicly funded. Communities need new schools, and they need all schools in Alberta to have enough teachers, educational assistants, and other administrative and support staff that work in them.

With educational support workers striking across the province, we're witnessing a prolonged period of chaos in education caused by the UCP's devaluing of essential workers within the education system. These workers are telling us that the education system needs adequate funding to support the growing student population, and they aren't wrong. Per student funding is lower in Alberta than anywhere else in Canada, and has been every year since the UCP took office.

Albertans are demanding strong investments in our public education system. They want new public schools and the staff hired to run them. These investments help to support our provincial economy as students join the workforce. Alberta's productive workforce was built in our world class public education system and we have to ensure this continues for generations to come.

And, let's be clear, education doesn't end in high school. We need to ensure that opportunities to learn and grow as citizens and workers exist for all ages and abilities. Colleges, post-secondaries, and trade schools offer Albertans a chance to develop their skills and secure high-wage jobs. A better educated and better trained workforce is a more productive workforce, so investments in all levels of education are investments in the future prosperity of our province.

Albertans have told us in the budget they want to see investments made in the following areas:

1. **Create and maintain a strong public education system.** Alberta's education system has suffered under the UCP's Weighted Moving Average funding model, which has caused thousands of students to go unfunded every year. Alberta families need a robust investment in public school capital projects to address school overcrowding, a funding model that brings per-student funding in line with the rest of the country, and classroom resources including sufficient teacher and support staff hiring. This together will ensure Alberta families have access to a world class public education system that works for them, no matter their child's needs.
2. **Ensure Alberta classrooms are safe and supportive for all students.** All students deserve to learn in a supportive classroom environment where they can thrive. To do this we need educational support workers in classrooms and we need that career path to be



economically viable for workers. Alberta must ensure that classroom funding matches the complexity of student needs. This includes ensuring all students who need psycho-educational assessments, regardless of their economic background, can get them. These assessments are a stepping stone to help a struggling student become a successful student.

3. **Increase operational funding for post-secondary institutions.** Post-secondaries in Alberta have seen a real cut in provincial operational grants of well over 30 per cent since 2019. To compensate for the cuts, tuition has had to increase significantly. Alberta is also projected to have record growth in students entering the post secondary system over the next decade. Alberta is already losing a disproportionate number of students to other provinces. If we want our brightest students to stay in Alberta, this will require a significant increase in domestic enrolment at our public post-secondary institutions.
4. **Make education as accessible as possible.** Student food bank usage has doubled in the past year, with 77 per cent of post-secondary students struggling to pay for their basic needs. Albertan students graduate with some of the highest levels of student debt in Canada due to punishing interest rates. Too many students have been forced to abandon their dreams of a post-secondary education because of prohibitive costs and unexpected changes to the student aid process. Alberta must have equitable access to student aid so that all Albertans have the best possible chance to continue their education. Ultimately, the government needs to make investments and decisions that support students and make post-secondary education affordable.
5. **Invest in skilled trades training.** Alberta has a diverse economy and growing population that requires workers with a range of knowledge and experience. Workers shape our province, from developing our resources and building homes to creating the infrastructure for our future and leading innovation in every industry. We need a made-in-Alberta skilled trades strategy and we need this strategy to include Indigenous participation. Ensuring access to skilled trades programs and upskilling means more Albertans can participate in key sectors of the economy and see meaningful career advancement.

## Public Safety

The state of public safety in Alberta has reached a crisis point under the UCP government's watch. With 61 per cent of Albertans reporting worsening crime in their communities and nearly 25 per cent experiencing victimization in the past four years, immediate action is required to address these critical failures.

The government's dismantling of our justice system must be reversed. The unacceptable backlog in our courts stands as evidence of chronic underfunding and mismanagement. The government must properly resource our courts and ultimately restore faith in our justice system.

The UCP government's short-sighted cuts to addiction services have directly contributed to increasing social disorder in our communities. The elimination of funding to proven rehabilitation programs has left organizations like the John Howard Society unable to deliver crucial services.

These reckless cuts must be reversed to restore essential community supports across both urban and rural communities.

The government's cuts to income support programs and family services have pushed vulnerable Albertans to the breaking point. Across our province, organizations working to combat rising homelessness are stretched beyond capacity, forced to turn away Albertans in desperate need because the UCP government refuses to provide adequate funding. Sexual assault survivors face months-long waitlists for critical services while the UCP government keeps funding frozen at inadequate levels. These cruel choices to balance the books on the backs of our most vulnerable citizens must be reversed.

The total cost of the UCP's cuts to essential services and public safety programs has far exceeded any claimed savings. The evidence shows 87 per cent of Albertans believe improving social services will have a positive impact on reducing crime, 86 per cent believe enhancing the justice system will help, and 83 per cent support increasing police service funding.

The 2025-26 budget represents an opportunity to reverse course on this government's failed approach to public safety.

Albertans have told us in the budget they want to see investments made in the following areas:

1. **Strengthen Legal Aid Alberta.** We need to ensure all Albertans can access justice regardless of income or location. The UCP has repeatedly failed to honor their governance agreement with Legal Aid Alberta, treating this essential service as an afterthought rather than a fundamental right. Their negligence reached a crisis point when their failure to complete basic contractual obligations nearly forced Legal Aid to shut down completely. The government must restore stable funding that keeps pace with population growth and community needs. Legal representation cannot be treated as a luxury when fundamental rights are at stake.
2. **Clear the massive court backlog.** Alberta urgently needs investment in judges, crown prosecutors, and court staff across the province. Lack of funding for the court systems is leading people to lose faith in our justice system. This can be reversed through increased transparency and funding. The courts are too important of an institution to continuously be pushed to the side.
3. **Fund community-based crime prevention and social services to address the root causes of crime.** When Albertans have stable housing, reliable access to food, adequate mental health care, and well-paying jobs, our communities become safer and stronger. By investing in these fundamental needs—including accessible mental health services, affordable housing initiatives, addiction recovery programs, and employment supports—we can address the root causes that often lead to crime and help build more resilient communities.
4. **Scrap plans for the unpopular provincial police force.** Instead, the government should support frontline RCMP and police officers with the resources they need to keep communities safe. Albertans are tired of seeing tax dollars wasted on an unwanted provincial police force.

5. **Address gender-based violence and support Indigenous community safety across Alberta.** The UCP's neglect of Indigenous communities through funding cuts to Indigenous-led programs and essential services requires immediate correction. The government must restore and enhance support for culturally appropriate services and Indigenous-led safety initiatives across urban, rural, and First Nations communities. The government must also invest in dedicated programs and services to combat gender-based violence.

## Stopping wasteful spending

The UCP government's CorruptCare scandal shows just how undisciplined and incompetent they have been when it comes to public taxpayer money. They are simply bad with money.

We can fund many of Albertans' priorities by cutting this waste. For example, the UCP government has wasted:

- \$1.5 billion on a oil pipeline everyone knew wouldn't be built
- \$600 million+ on bloated private surgical contracts
- \$70 million+ on Turkish Tylenol
- \$100 million+ on the canceled Dynalife contract
- \$4.5 million on COVID reports that printed out Conspiracy theorists' Twitter feeds
- \$2 million on an insider land flip

...And counting. This government is world-class at wasting money.