



COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION  
*of* Southeastern Alberta

# VitalFocus.®

2 0 2 1



COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATIONS  
OF CANADA

MEDICINE HAT & SOUTHEAST ALBERTA

**VitalSigns.®**

# Table of Contents //

<b>Mental Health</b> .....	3
<b>Work &amp; Economy</b> .....	7
<b>Vulnerable Populations</b> .....	12
— <b>Food Security</b> .....	13
— <b>Housing Stability</b> .....	15
— <b>Domestic Violence</b> .....	17



## On The Bright Side

The sun symbol highlights an unexpected positive that emerged during the pandemic.

## What is Vital Signs?

**Vital Signs®** is a community check-up conducted by community foundations across Canada that measures the vitality of our communities. It identifies significant trends in a range of areas critical to quality of life. Vital Signs is coordinated nationally by Community Foundations of Canada. *The Vital Signs trademark is used with permission from Community Foundations of Canada.*

A **Vital Focus Report** provides a comprehensive overview of a prominent issue in a community. This publication focuses on the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact that it has had so far across Southeastern Alberta.

The Community Foundation of Southeastern Alberta (CFSEA) witnessed the establishment of community partnerships and collaborations in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic that affected virtually every aspect of our daily lives. As a result, this report focuses on three impact areas that were substantially affected by the pandemic: **Mental Health, Work & Economy**, and **Vulnerable Populations** (highlighting food security, housing stability, and domestic violence).


## Land Acknowledgement

The Community Foundation of Southeastern Alberta honours and acknowledges that we are situated on Treaty 7 and Treaty 4 territory, traditional lands of the Siksika (Blackfoot), Kainai (Blood), Piikani (Peigan), Stoney-Nakoda, and Tsuut'ina (Sarcee) as well as the Cree, Sioux, and the Saulteaux bands of the Ojibwa peoples. We honour and acknowledge that we are on the homelands of the Métis Nation within Region III.

## How To Use This Report

The goal of this **Vital Focus** is to encourage dialogue. By sharing this community knowledge, CFSEA aims to initiate community conversations, inform donors concerning issues and opportunities in the community, and increase the effectiveness of grant making by identifying areas of need. Residents, businesses, community organizations, educational institutions, and government leaders may use the information in Vital Signs reports to take action and direct resources where they will have the greatest impact.

## Methodology

This **Vital Focus** report combines publicly available information and statistics from various credible sources, as well as data provided by local charities and other organizations, to provide an overview of the community. Data was drawn from local, provincial, and national organizations and sources and is as current and relevant as possible, though the statistics presented in this report may have changed at the time of reading. Cited references for content can be found online at [bit.ly/MHVitalSigns2021](https://bit.ly/MHVitalSigns2021) 

## Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were established as part of the United Nations' Agenda 2030 and are a set of 17 interconnected objectives dedicated to eliminating poverty, minimizing inequality, and supporting responsible, sustainable growth by the end of 2030. Throughout this Vital Focus report, icons representing the SDGs that are relevant to each impact area are featured at the beginning of each section to raise awareness and inspire action towards these goals. For more information on the Sustainable Development Goals, visit <https://sdgs.un.org/>



## Message from Community Leadership Committee Chair



CFSEA is excited to introduce the 2021 Vital Focus report. This publication highlights 3 impact areas that were heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. The stories heard and the statistics gathered each year through Vital events help CFSEA target granting priorities, and this year is no different. In the wake of the pandemic, our communities faced many enhanced challenges such as poor mental health, unemployment, food insecurity, homelessness, and domestic violence.

In response, CFSEA pivoted granting priorities to support charities across Southeast Alberta. Over \$1.2M was distributed in total across the region in 2020 through various funding streams. Of that, \$906,956 directly supported agencies working with those disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

CFSEA and the Community Leadership Committee continue to strive for increased awareness of CFSEA through marketing campaigns such as *When Giving Matters Most*. We believe that everyone can relate to when giving matters most to them. Perhaps it mattered most during the COVID-19 pandemic, or in memory of a loved one, or during disaster relief, the reasons are endless.

It is through the generosity of Southeastern Alberta residents that CFSEA can invest the donations to grow the endowment fund. It is through these funds that we can give back to the community(s) and impact those around us.

The objective for the 2021 Vital Focus is not to provide answers but rather to inspire thought, foster conversation, and assist in identifying areas for you to contribute to your community where support is essential. As we move forward together through uncharted waters, we hope this report encourages you to help our region continue to grow and succeed.

*Myrna Stark*

### CFSEA Community Leadership Committee

**Myrna Stark**, Chair  
**Frances Barnes**, Ex Officio

**Jason Openo**  
**Karen Blewett**  
**Lance Doll**  
**Marco Jansen**  
**Rachel Kruitbosch**  
**Shelley Beck**

VITAL FOCUS:

# Mental Health

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL



## What is Mental Health?

Mental health is the state of psychological and emotional well-being, which is a necessary resource for living a healthy life and a main factor in overall health.<sup>1,10</sup> Fear, worry, and stress are normal responses when faced with uncertainty or the unknown. Therefore, it is understandable, and even normal, that mental health has been impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>1,18</sup>



**"In a perfect world, people would have the general understanding that we all have mental health, the same way we all have physical health."**

-Patti Wagman, Program Coordinator, Community Coming Together

## How COVID-19 Impacted Mental Health

### Decreased Life Satisfaction

**72%**  
Satisfied

**40%**  
Satisfied\*

2018

2019

2020



\*The lowest level of life satisfaction reported in 17 years.<sup>1,8</sup>

**Albertans had the lowest mental health scores out of all provinces in January, February, and March 2021.<sup>1,8</sup>**

## Increased Alcohol and Substance Use

**On average, 2.5 people died every day in Alberta due to opioids. //**

*In the first six months of 2020<sup>1,9</sup>*

Since the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, both alcohol and substance use increased considerably. Approximately **one in five** Canadians said they were drinking more, with 28% of males and 16% of females reporting problematic alcohol use.<sup>1,4; 1.15</sup>

March 2020 saw a considerable increase in opioid use, in conjunction with fewer individuals accessing treatment and harm reduction services.

**Medicine Hat had the ninth most hospitalizations in Alberta related to opioids and other drug use and had the fifth highest rate of hospitalizations related to overdose in Canada.<sup>1,12</sup>**

### REASONS FOR INCREASED ALCOHOL USE INCLUDED<sup>1,15</sup>

**51%**

Lack of regular schedule



**49%**

Boredom



**44%**

Stress



## Increased Suicidal Thoughts and Risk of Suicide

Although there were reported increases in depression, anxiety, and substance use, **the number of provincial suicides decreased.** However, while the number of suicides decreased, suicidal ideation and **thoughts increased.**



**1 in 10**

Canadians experienced thoughts or feelings of suicide in 2020, compared to one in 40 in 2019.<sup>1,6</sup>

Even though the number of provincial suicides decreased in 2020, locally, the numbers increased as Medicine Hat faced tragic loss due to the suicide contagion in early 2020.

## Keep In Touch

The Keep in Touch program was created with the goal of connecting a volunteer with an individual who may be feeling lonely or isolated, during a time when social connection was limited. The program, funded by the Government of Alberta, was established by the Community Foundation of Southeastern Alberta and then adopted by the Canadian Mental Health Association Alberta Southeast Region (CMHA ASER).

**“I was feeling lonely for a while but my volunteer caller has done me a world of good. When I know I have someone there for me, supporting and encouraging me, it makes a world of difference. These calls have been something to look forward to in the midst of the lock downs.”**

– Participant with the Keep in Touch Program, CMHA ASER

## Top Concerns //

**48%**

Financial concerns<sup>1,6</sup>

**55%**

Social isolation from friends & family<sup>1,6</sup>

### Staying Connected

According to the CMHA Alberta Division, 56.7% of Albertans said that staying connected was one of the main ways to help their mental health.<sup>1,7</sup>

**49%**

Personal health<sup>1,6</sup>

**54%**

Health of loved ones<sup>1,6</sup>

### Getting Outside

Canadians spent more time outside during the pandemic. There is a direct correlation between having a connection to nature and the ability to cope during challenging times.<sup>1,8</sup> Locally, 85.9% of Medicine Hat respondents strongly agreed that municipal park areas contributed to improving their quality of life in the community.<sup>1,1</sup>



## Same Storm... Different Boats

Although the pandemic had a considerable impact on virtually all Canadians, specific demographics were disproportionately affected.

### Seniors (age 65+)

Although seniors were considerably vulnerable to COVID-19, they were the only age group that did not report a decline in mental health as of July 2020.<sup>1,8</sup> Due to the pandemic, various programs were developed to support seniors' mental health.

*\*This data does not specify whether the population sample includes those living in long-term care facilities.*

### Health Care Professionals

Statistics Canada found that seven in 10 health care workers reported worsening mental health during the pandemic.<sup>1,17</sup> Additionally, caregivers such as psychologists, health care workers, and first responders faced compassion fatigue as they helped those suffering from the impact of the pandemic. Compassion fatigue occurs when caregivers are continuously exposed to tragedies, pain, and suffering, which can eventually lead to individuals growing numb to others' hardships.<sup>1,3</sup>

**"Just because you work in mental health doesn't mean that you're mentally healthy."**

- Breanne Mellen, Suicide Prevention Program Coordinator, Canadian Mental Health Association ASER

### Indigenous Peoples & Visible Minorities


Indigenous Canadians were more likely to have felt depressed, lonely and isolated, and to report increased alcohol use.<sup>1,5</sup> They were also twice as likely to have tried to harm themselves, and 20% had thoughts or feelings of suicide in 2020.<sup>1,5, 1,6</sup>

**"Mental health in the Indigenous community is viewed from a different perspective than in Western culture. Connection to culture is key to the overall wellbeing of individuals. Many people were shamed by residential schools, the removal from their families, and the racism they faced which caused disconnection from their community and culture. This is beginning to shift as Indigenous People are now standing up and demanding change, equal treatment, and celebrating their resilience along with the beauty and diversity of their culture."**

- Ken Turner, Cultural Addictions Counselor, Miywasin Friendship Centre

### Women

Throughout the pandemic, women consistently reported lower mental health scores than men. In March 2021, the mental health score of women was -13.1 compared to a score of -9.4 for men.<sup>1,11</sup> In households with children, childcare stress was more common among females (14%) than males (4%).<sup>1,11</sup>

 **Better Relationships.** With families being home throughout the pandemic, 66% of parents reported they were spending more quality time with their children.<sup>1,8</sup>

### Youth & Students (age 15-24)

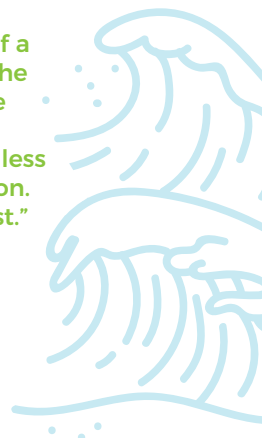
In 2019, 60% of youth reported excellent or very good mental health, by July 2020, this number dropped to 40%, the largest decline in mental health for any age group.<sup>1,8</sup> As of April 2021, full-time post-secondary students had the lowest mental health score (-26.1) for the eleventh consecutive month.<sup>1,11</sup>

 **Increased Resiliency.** Despite the consequences of the pandemic, 38% of parents reported their children showed increased resilience.<sup>1,5</sup>

Participants who identified as visible minorities were three times more likely to report a perceived increase in the frequency of harassment or attacks based on race, ethnicity, or skin colour since the pandemic, compared with the rest of survey respondents.<sup>1,16</sup>

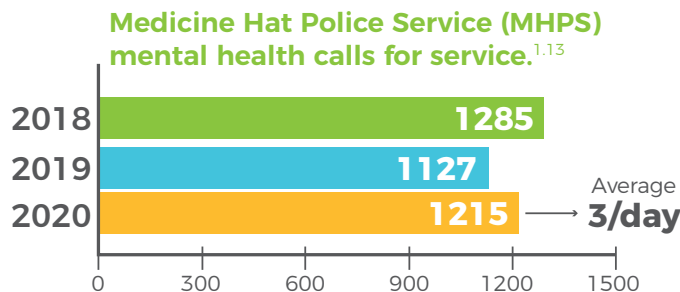
**"Stigma [regarding mental health] is more of a barrier than language for new immigrants. The Healing Path Wellness Centre provides a safe place where a newcomer meets with both a psychologist and a cultural navigator, and is less intimidating than a traditional therapy session. There are currently 651 people on our waitlist."**

- Ahmed Kassem, Executive Director, Global Village Centre in Brooks



## How Has Mental Health Been Supported Locally?

The pandemic and associated challenges reinforced the importance of seeking support for both mental and physical health. In a survey from April 2021, nearly half (45%) of Canadians felt the need for mental health support.<sup>1,11</sup> However, of those that did not take action on mental health despite the need, 30% believed that affordable care was not available, 29% reported that they did not have the energy to seek care, and 27% did not know which type of care was best for them<sup>1,11</sup>



### \$100,000

**MHPS / Government of Alberta Grant**  
Employ two trained mental health professionals.<sup>1,14</sup>

### \$220,000

**CMHA ASER / Government of Alberta Investment**

Access to bereavement counselling and suicide prevention information, and awareness and training programs.<sup>1,14</sup> An additional \$100,000 will be given to CMHA through the provincial COVID-19 community grant program to expand an addiction crisis program that offers outreach support to adults and youth.<sup>1,14</sup>

### \$140 million

**Government of Alberta**

Over four years to implement a recovery-oriented continuum of addiction and mental health care.<sup>1,14</sup>

### \$150,000+

**Community Foundation (CFSEA)**

Distributed to numerous local agencies supporting mental health during the pandemic with the additional support of the City of Medicine Hat and the provincial and federal governments.

## Ways to Support Mental Health

### Continuing the Conversation around Mental Health

Although mental health challenges existed long before 2020, the pandemic exacerbated these challenges. However, it also increased the recognition of the importance of mental health and the impact of local collaborations among agencies. Mental health concerns will remain post pandemic and so, the conversations that have emerged must continue in order to progress. The stigma attached to mental illness often prevents individuals from seeking help, which results in people struggling in silence.<sup>1,2</sup> By providing support, understanding, and acceptance, seeking professional care can become more accessible.<sup>1,2</sup> However, access to care is also important and an increase in system capacity is necessary to ensure appropriate mental health support.

**“COVID-19 presented an opportunity to shift how we look at providing services. We needed to take a step back from what we were doing and try different methods to ensure consistency with our ability to deliver the same quality of care. We went from providing approximately 3,500 virtual appointments to community members from Bassano, Bow Island, Brooks, Medicine Hat, and Oyen in 2019 to more than 17,800 in 2020. Maintaining a continuum of care for our patients will always be a priority for our teams.”**

- Trevor Inaba, Director, Addiction & Mental Health Community-Based Services: Alberta Health Services - South Zone

The collective mental well-being of the community can benefit through education, communication, and increased knowledge of mental health. Local agencies have identified the importance of continuing to collect local data, building community vocabulary, increasing awareness, and creating safe spaces for conversations about mental health. Various local organizations are working to build a connected community that is resilient and accepting of vulnerability, which will ultimately benefit the well-being of citizens and the community as a whole.

## VITAL FOCUS:

# Work & Economy //

SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT  
GOALS

## What is Employment?

An individual is considered employed if they did any work for pay or profit or had a job but were absent from work due to various reasons.<sup>2,14</sup> The unemployment rate is defined as the number of unemployed persons expressed as a percentage of the labour force.<sup>2,14</sup>

## How COVID-19 Impacted Work & Economy



The COVID-19 pandemic sent a sudden shock through labour markets, which had a considerable impact on work and employment in a variety of ways. The economic shutdowns resulted in historic declines in employment and hours worked.

**Nationally, by September 2020, Alberta had one of the largest declines in economic activity.<sup>2,15</sup>**

**“It’s hard to keep a small business up and running, let alone profitable, in the best of times. After being shut down on multiple occasions, it’s not so easy for the “little guys” to bounce back. People get out of the habit of coming for personal services and, well, some of them just don’t come back.”**

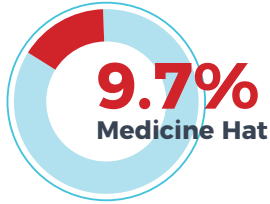
- Shelby Blair, owner of Hidden Gem Day Spa in Oyen, who closed her shop and reopened it out of her home due to long periods of business closures during the pandemic.



## Temporary or Permanent Job Loss

By April 2020, a total of **5.5 million Canadians** were affected by either job loss or substantially reduced hours due to the pandemic.<sup>2,13</sup>

### Average Unemployment Rates 2020<sup>2,3</sup>



Local businesses

**41.8%**  
laid off staff

March to September 2020

Of these,

**46.8%**  
were rehired<sup>2,11</sup>



## Temporary or Permanent Business Closures

**38.7%** temporarily shut down from local businesses March to September 2020.<sup>2,12</sup>

Number of Businesses in:<sup>2,12</sup>

Medicine Hat

**2,279** | -1.77% ↓ 2,320 (2019)  
2,279 (2020)

Brooks

**652** | -5.23% ↓ 688 (2019)  
652 (2020)

## Opening New Businesses

Although the overall number of businesses in Medicine Hat decreased, there were **538 business license applications processed in 2020.**

## Working Remotely

As of January 2021,

**5.4 million**  
Canadians were working remotely.<sup>2,15</sup>

In a study with local businesses, **25.2%** had employees working remotely, while over half said there were no remote work options for their employees.<sup>2,11</sup>



## Moving Online

The lockdowns pushed many customers to purchase products and merchandise online instead of in-store. In a study of Southeastern Alberta, 84.2% of businesses had an online platform.<sup>2,11</sup> Shop YXH (ShopYXH.ca), a local online marketplace, emerged in the wake of the pandemic and, to date, has featured over 150 Southeast Alberta businesses, 9,000 products, and has had over 45,000 unique visitors.

**“The ongoing pandemic has been a rollercoaster for local businesses. Shop YXH was created to bring the business community together on one online platform and encourage residents to discover and buy local. The marketplace and social media platforms for Shop YXH also allow us to support the business’ marketing efforts by advertising their products and services for free.”**

- Kelli Ireland, Project Manager, Shop YXH



## Same Storm... Different Boats

Although the pandemic had a considerable impact on virtually all Canadians, specific demographics were disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Women

Work-life balance and childcare challenges affected women more than men, and many women assumed the responsibility of additional family duties, such as children's schooling, while remaining in full-time employment.<sup>22</sup> As of March 2021, more than 16,000 women had dropped out of the national labour force completely since the start of the pandemic, while the male labour force had grown by 91,000.<sup>28</sup> As a result of many women being forced to exit the workforce, **decades worth of advancements in women's labour-force participation have been reversed within a year.**<sup>29</sup>

**Small business owners employ approximately 95% of Albertans. Women entrepreneurs can add another \$2 billion to the national economy by increasing their revenue by 20%. Providing women the support they need to expand their businesses is good for women and good for Alberta.**<sup>25</sup>

### Rural Communities

A significant challenge rural communities faced during the pandemic was the "digital divide," which refers to the difference in access to communications technology and reliable internet across regions. The pandemic forced millions of Canadians to work, go to school, and socialize online. However, 67% of rural areas in Alberta did not have access to reliable broadband internet coverage.<sup>24</sup>

**"Our rural business faced the combined challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the rural-specific technology challenges, which felt overwhelming at times. Internet service is often sporadic and always slow. This, unfortunately, impacts our team, our work, and our customers on a daily basis."**

- Kathy Henderson, Office Manager at South Island Farms in County of Forty Mile

### Indigenous Peoples & Visible Minorities

By the end of 2020, the unemployment rate among Indigenous Peoples remained higher (12% unemployment for men and 11% unemployment for women) than non-Indigenous people (8% unemployment for both men and women).<sup>215</sup> Visible minority groups continue to experience higher levels of unemployment, financial difficulties, and over-representation in low-wage jobs.<sup>215</sup>

### Youth & Students (age 15-24)

Youth and students had greater difficulty finding employment during the pandemic. In May 2020, the unemployment rate among returning students was 40.0% and, while it fell to 23.1% in May 2021, these unemployment rates were still greater than they were in May 2019 (13.7%).<sup>216</sup> As of January 2021, 15 to 24 year-olds accounted for 45% of net employment losses since the start of the pandemic.<sup>215</sup>

### Recent Immigrants

In 2020, employment among recent immigrants decreased more from February to April (-23.2%) than it did for those born in Canada (-14.0%).<sup>213</sup> Since the start of the pandemic, the number of new immigrants admitted to Canada declined about 60%.<sup>215</sup> Moving forward, a rebound in immigration will be essential for labour-market recovery, as immigration accounts for considerable growth in Canada's labour force.<sup>215</sup>

**"In Brooks, at JBS Foods for example, they rely on a large immigrant workforce. With the pandemic and the lack of foreign workers being admitted to Canada, many employers are finding there is a lack of skilled workers available and thus many positions are sitting vacant."**

- Jessica Surgenor, Manager of Community Development, City of Brooks

# How Has Work & Economy Been Supported Locally?

## Federal Funding

The Canadian government offered various assistance packages to support businesses with the economic impact of the pandemic. In a survey of 502 Medicine Hat businesses: <sup>2,11</sup>

**46.23%** received the **Canadian Emergency Business Account**.



received the **Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy**.



received the **Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance**.

## Local Funding



**\$8.2million**

**City of Medicine Hat COVID-19 assistance package** <sup>2,3</sup>

Included in this amount was the **City of Medicine Hat Business Innovation Grant (MHBIG)**, facilitated through *Community Futures Entre-Corp* and *Invest Medicine Hat*, which granted \$2 million to be reinvested into local businesses. <sup>2,3</sup>

## Provincial Funding

The Government of Alberta launched multiple assistance packages for both businesses and municipalities in response to the pandemic. The **Small and Medium Enterprise Relaunch Grant (SMERG)** was offered to Alberta organizations who were impacted by COVID-19. In Alberta's Southeast region, the grant had a total of:



**1,318**  
applications



**\$8,747,652**  
benefit payouts



**\$6,637**  
average benefit

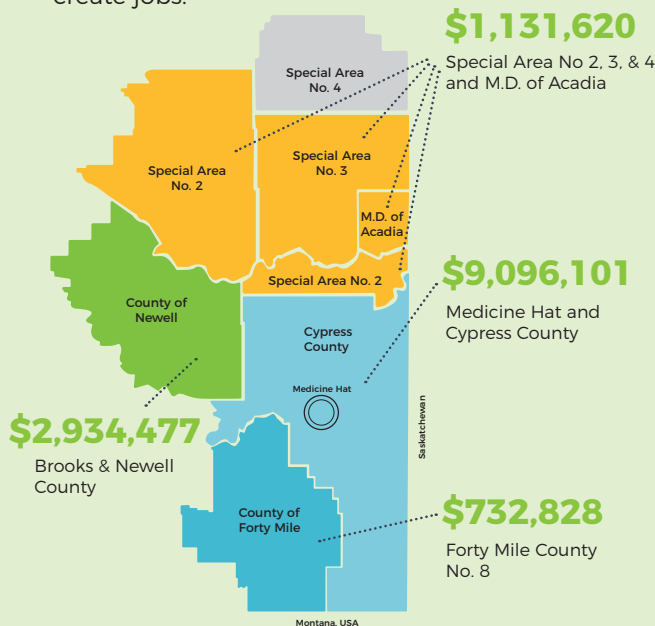
The provincial government also launched the **Municipal Stimulus Program (MSP)** to stimulate municipal economies, fund infrastructure, and create jobs. <sup>2,6, 2,7</sup>



**\$4.8million**

**Federal Regional Relief and Recovery Fund (RRRF)**

*Community Futures Entre-Corp* supported economic development both within Medicine Hat and throughout rural areas by distributing funds into Southeastern Alberta from the federal **Regional Relief and Recovery Fund (RRRF)**.



**\$1.1million**

**Community Futures Entre-Corp**

Distributed through community economic development projects to support small businesses in moving their businesses online, supporting their innovations, and supporting new technologies to assist in managing staff remotely.



## Medicine Hat & Brooks YMCAs<sup>2,17</sup>

### Employment Services


 **491** Clients served

 **464** Resumés created

 **86** Job placement services

### Transition to Employment Services

 **175** Applicants accepted

 **153** Obtained full time employment

**668 job seekers**

**25 employers**

**273 job offers**



## Drive-Thru Job Fairs

The YMCA, in partnership with Medicine Hat College and the Government of Alberta Community and Social Services and Labour and Immigration Ministries, hosted multiple drive-thru job fairs in Medicine Hat and Brooks as an alternate way for job seekers to connect with businesses. The five events in 2020 and 2021 were attended by 668 job seekers and 25 employers, and resulted in 273 job offers to fill 377 vacant positions.<sup>2,18</sup>

# Ways to Support Work & Economy

## Support Small Business

When residents support small businesses and spend their money locally, they are assisting in the revitalization of the economy. Only 50% of small businesses survive past five years and in 2020, 96.1% of businesses in Medicine Hat were considered small businesses (1-49 employees).<sup>2,10,2,12</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic hit smaller businesses harder than any other sized business, amplifying their need for support.<sup>2,10</sup>

### How to support small businesses<sup>2,11</sup>



- » Buy goods and services from small local businesses
- » Follow and share social media content
- » Leave an online review
- » Recommend businesses to others

### Local First

Local First was a campaign initiated by the Medicine Hat and District Chamber of Commerce, in collaboration with community partners, to promote businesses in Medicine Hat and surrounding communities.<sup>2,10</sup> Local businesses create 4.6 times more impact and so, supporting local businesses has a considerable influence as it keeps money within the community and region.<sup>2,10</sup>



### How to support local businesses



- » Shopping at and visiting local businesses
- » Hiring local employees
- » Contracting and promoting local businesses

## Community Collaborations

The Medicine Hat and District Chamber of Commerce's survey found that 20.5% of local companies partnered to create collaborations with similar companies or organizations to reach new customers or shared clientele during the pandemic.<sup>2,11</sup>

**"As we launched in fall of 2020, we recognized the need to collaborate and work with other local businesses. It's impossible in today's economy to work as an "island." The pandemic has highlighted the need to support local businesses, and the need for local businesses to stick together and help one another along."**

- Kyle Church, Marketing and Communications Manager, Camp Ice Cream

VITAL FOCUS:

# Vulnerable Populations //



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



## What are Vulnerable Populations?

Vulnerable populations are groups and communities at a higher risk for poor health as a result of the barriers they experience to social, economic, political, and environmental resources, as well as limitations due to illness or disability.<sup>3,3</sup> The pandemic accelerated the challenges that vulnerable populations faced throughout Southeastern Alberta, specifically the areas of food security, housing stability, and domestic violence.

Poverty costs Canada approx.



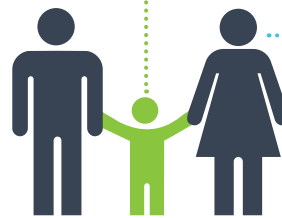
**\$72-84 billion**/year <sup>3.1</sup>

Individual taxpayers contribute between



**\$2,700-3,600** annually to manage poverty. <sup>3.6</sup>

**10.1%** of Canadians live in poverty <sup>3.5</sup>



In the Medicine Hat-Cardston-Warner federal riding

**2 in 10** children live in poverty <sup>3.4</sup>

**16.7%** of Albertans under the age of 18 lived under the poverty threshold in 2018 <sup>3.2</sup>

\*The poverty threshold is calculated as 50% of the median income in Canada.

"Data, research, and the voices of people with lived experience have all shown how women, youth, seniors, 2SLGBTQIA+, Indigenous, newcomers, people with disabilities, and racialized communities are disproportionately affected by poverty, housing instability, food insecurity, and domestic violence. The issues community members face and the experiences they have are all connected. We can't have any conversations about equity without considering these intersections and voices...it's about everything from the economy to social support to the very ways we think about inequality."

- Dr. Alina Turner, President and Co-Founder, HelpSeeker



## What is Food Security?

Food security is when individuals have consistent physical, social, and financial access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets the dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy lifestyle.<sup>4,7</sup>

## How COVID-19 Impacted Food Security

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the financial stability of Canadians, which ultimately influenced the food security of many households.<sup>4,6</sup>

### Increased Food Insecurity



Prior to the pandemic, an estimated **10.5%** of Canadians were facing food insecurity.<sup>4,5</sup>

As people faced income insecurity, through job loss or a reduction in hours worked, the financial impact of the pandemic exacerbated existing food security challenges.<sup>4,6</sup> The pandemic also disrupted food access and led to unexpected changes in food prices. In **May 2020, approximately**

**1 in 7**  **or 14.6%** of Canadians estimated to live in a food-insecure household <sup>4,6</sup>

At the onset of the pandemic, **food insecurity for households with children** rose by 7% to... <sup>4,6</sup>



**19.2%**

“The pandemic greatly impacted our daily meal program. Before the pandemic, we fed about 30-35 people per day, but during the height of the pandemic, our feeding program averaged about **110 people per day, with our highest day feeding 137 people.**” - Colette Eirich, Managing Director, The Mustard Seed Medicine Hat



### Disruption of Supply Chains

The pandemic revealed the importance and fragility of food supply chains by exposing the vulnerabilities of supply chains to market, labour, and border disruptions.<sup>4,2</sup> During the pandemic, many people experienced the inability to purchase particular grocery items, revealing the fragility of food security on a community level.

“There were several months at the start of the pandemic where purchasing groceries, particularly flour and yeast, were nearly impossible. The irony of this is that Medicine Hat and Southeastern Alberta sits in the middle of an agricultural area where grain is grown, and yet flour was occasionally impossible to purchase. Our reliance on large industrial food processors did not serve us well in this pandemic, which highlighted the need for community food security.”

-Alison Van Dyke, Food Security Coordinator, Community Food Connections Association

## Growing Your Own Food

“We saw a significant increase in people's interest in growing their own food to ensure household food security. We were able to meet some of this demand by providing vegetable container gardens through grants from CFSEA to give people the opportunity to begin to learn to garden and provide some fresh produce for their households.”

- Alison Van Dyke, Food Security Coordinator, Community Food Connections Association

## How Has Food Security Been Supported Locally?

Most organizations that provide food support throughout Southeastern Alberta reported a steep increase in demand for services early into the pandemic. The Medicine Hat and District Food Bank provided emergency food and offered numerous programs to help keep the community fed. They also continued the Brown Bag Lunch program in 2020 by delivering directly to the homes of online learners despite schools being closed.<sup>4,3</sup>



**55,000 LBS** /month

Food distributed by the **Medicine Hat and District Food Bank** to approximately 10% of our community.<sup>4,3</sup>



In 2020, the **Brooks Food Bank Foundation** distributed food hampers to

**656** households 

**1,025** adults  **582** children 

The **Salvation Army** served



**29,979**  
meals in 2020

The **Mustard Seed** served



**29,612**  
meals in 2020



**Community Food Connections'** Good Food Club provided affordable fresh fruits and vegetables to

**80** households/month

## Ways to Support Food Security

### Supporting Local Initiatives

The Medicine Hat and District Food Bank's new community food centre is set to open in late 2021 and will offer a range of programming and services designed to address long-term food insecurity. The centre is based on evidence that suggests that food banks, in their current form, are not fully effective or a sustainable solution to manage or address food insecurity. The centre will focus on bringing people together and teaching them the skills required to budget, shop, prepare, and preserve food.

**"The new community food centre is a place of inclusivity where community is built around food. The centre will provide innovative programming to move our community members into a position of food security by featuring a community kitchen, gardens, and a beautiful community cafe where everyone can connect. We are also a food hub to 42 community organizations and this new facility will be an exciting way to build on these partnerships."**

- Melissa Mullis, Director of Community Relations, Medicine Hat and District Food Bank

The Mustard Seed is opening a **Health and Wellness Centre**, which will provide comprehensive interventions in a single, easily accessible location. These include supports such as counselling, assessment, and occupational therapy, as well as system navigation to access food, clothing, identification services, transportation, health education, and financial security. This model will help support access to health services that are typically unattainable for people experiencing homelessness and adverse poverty.

### Building Resilient Food Systems

The importance of local food production and shortened supply chains was heightened during the pandemic to ensure community food security. It is estimated that food prices will increase between three and five percent in 2021, severely affecting food-insecure households.<sup>4,1</sup> By transitioning to regionally and locally controlled food chains, more resilient and diverse food systems are created, which revitalizes the economic renewal of rural and remote communities, ensures greater access to healthy and fresh foods, supports lower-emissions food systems, builds greater resilience to shocks, and reduces food loss and waste.<sup>4,2</sup>

### Prairie Gleaners

Prairie Gleaners seeks to help those in need by utilizing unmarketable produce that would otherwise go to waste.

They receive produce from greenhouse owners/operators and farms in Southern Alberta and turn it into a dehydrated vegetable mix that can then be shipped all across the world to feed the hungry. In 2020, **188,502 kilograms (kgs)** of product was received, which equates to **1,036 kgs of produce used per day.**<sup>4,4</sup>



# What is Housing Instability?

Housing instability encompasses a number of challenges associated with housing needs, such as difficulty paying rent, overcrowding, frequent moving, or spending 30% of household income on housing.<sup>5,3</sup>

## How COVID-19 Impacted Housing Stability

Given the financial impact of the pandemic, housing needs and instability increased considerably throughout Southeastern Alberta.

### Difficulty Paying Rent

As individuals faced job loss, a reduction in hours worked, and income insecurity, the financial impact of the pandemic put additional strains on individuals facing housing challenges. A considerable number of individuals struggled with mortgage or rent payments, finding suitable housing or rentals, and paying utility bills.

Average Bachelor Unit in Medicine Hat<sup>5,4</sup>



Average Bachelor Unit in Brooks<sup>5,4</sup>

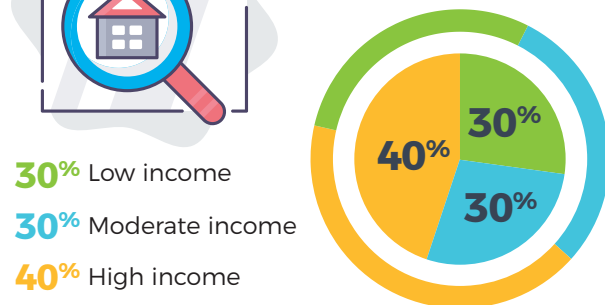


*“Individuals or families that have not previously struggled with employment, food insecurities, or housing instability struggle to connect with services. This population often lacks in their ability to navigate the social serving system as they have not required support services prior to COVID-19.”*

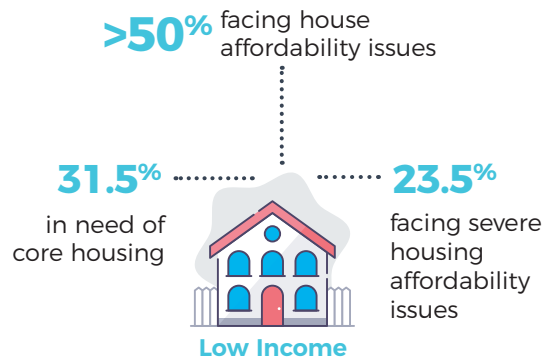
- Kevin Dornian, Southeast Zone Programs Manager, McMan Youth, Family, and Community Services

### Housing Affordability

In 2019, there were an estimated **27,373 households** in Medicine Hat.<sup>5,7</sup> Of these:



- 30% Low income
- 30% Moderate income
- 40% High income



*A household is in "core housing need" if they live in unacceptable housing or have to spend 30% or more before-tax income to access acceptable local housing.<sup>5,7</sup>*

**Rural Consideration:** Homelessness in rural and remote communities is often hidden and typically does not present as it does in urban centres. Additionally, homelessness and housing insecurity in rural areas is critically under-studied and data is minimal, making it difficult to understand and support.<sup>5,1</sup>

**“The pandemic’s impact on service delivery was met with confidence and the ability to quickly respond with innovation. The system of care did not have the ability to work from home and adjusted to meet whatever challenge the days brought. Had we not had great systems already in place, the pandemic would have taken a much different toll on those we serve.”**

- Jaime Rogers, Manager - Homeless & Housing Development Department, Medicine Hat Community Housing Society



## How Has Housing Stability Been Supported Locally?

Medicine Hat was the first city to achieve functional zero chronic homelessness in Canada.<sup>5,2</sup> Functional zero means there were three or less individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in the community for three consecutive months. Chronic homelessness is used to describe people who are currently experiencing homelessness and have been for at least a total of six months over the past year. Various organizations within Southeastern Alberta provide programs to assist those experiencing housing needs.

The **McMan Youth Hub** helps connect youth with permanent housing, mental wellness, financial supports, and other resources.<sup>5,5</sup>

**174** youth (12-24yrs) supported

→ **652** supported referrals were made to the community

The **McMan Daytime Shelter** was established in December 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Services used by  
**345**  
unique individuals

Shelter was accessed  
**4,985** times  
(Dec. 2020 - Mar. 2021)



### Medicine Hat Community Housing Society

**33** individuals housed  
(Apr. 2020 - Mar. 2021)

*Housing First program, Permanent Supportive Housing, and Rapid Resolution program.*

Referrals accessed  
**157**  
times

Referral services were offered on-site at **Medicine Hat Community Housing**

*Referrals were made to self-isolation units, overnight accommodation, food security services, employment services, legal services, housing, income, cultural, medical, mental health, and addictions supports.*



The Medicine Hat Police Service, in partnership with the Medicine Hat Community Housing Society and the City of Medicine Hat Parks and Recreation Department, established the **Homeless Encampment Strategy** to reduce homeless encampments in the city and increase awareness of local housing programs.<sup>5,6</sup> The program proactively searches city areas to identify homeless encampments, where occupants are provided with information about local housing programs and then removed from these locations.<sup>5,6</sup>

## Ways to Support Housing Supporting Local Initiatives

Locally, there is a need for more community housing units for low-income households, as there is a considerable waitlist.<sup>5,7</sup> Moving forward, important goals to ensure community housing needs are supported in the future include:<sup>5,7</sup>

- » increasing the supply of rental housing that is affordable for low-income households
- » ensuring there is adequate and appropriate housing supports
- » optimizing the existing rental housing stock
- » encouraging a broad range of dwelling types and tenures that meet the needs of current and future residents

The effects of the pandemic and the programs that emerged from it re-emphasizes the need for a community hub, where various social supports and on-site community services are available in a single, easily accessible location for vulnerable populations. This model supports improved service collaboration and addresses holistic community and individual needs.

**“The temporary Emergency COVID-19 Daytime Shelter identified the need for a community hub model for vulnerable individuals. Due to lack of infrastructure, individuals who need support often attend multiple locations in different areas of the city to connect to a range of services. A hub model would eliminate this and multiple services could be offered on-site to connect individuals and families with mental health, addiction, employment, treatment, housing, identification, and many other supports.”**

- Kevin Dornian, Southeast Zone Programs Manager, McMan Youth, Family, and Community Services



# What is Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence is a pattern of abuse that a partner (former or current) uses to control the behaviour of another. Domestic violence can be physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, psychological, economic, or spiritual.<sup>6.4</sup>

Given the stigmatic nature of domestic violence, cases often go unreported. As a result, while the data available offers a glimpse into the frequency of these incidents, it does not represent the full picture.

## How COVID-19 Impacted Domestic Violence

Home was not a safe place for some individuals during the pandemic; for some, it was the most dangerous.

### Increased Domestic Violence Occurrences

Nationally, one in 10 women is very or extremely concerned about the possibility of violence in the home.<sup>6.5</sup>



Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society (MHWSS) <sup>6.2</sup>



Medicine Hat Police Service (MHPS) <sup>6.1</sup>

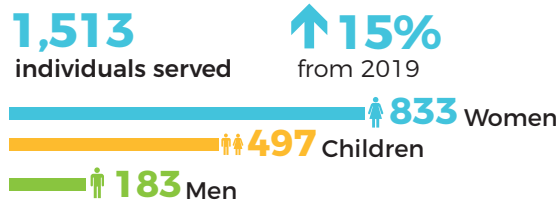
### Decreased Access to Support Services

Throughout the pandemic, challenges in temporarily escaping abusive partners were exacerbated as mobility was constrained, social distancing measures were imposed, and economic vulnerabilities increased. Additionally, safety and privacy to connect via phone or internet were challenged, finding alternative housing was more difficult, and various community supports were either closed, experienced service interruptions, or had a lack of sufficient resources for service.<sup>6.3</sup>

**As a result, clients were either unable to access supports or spent significantly lengthier periods of time in shelters.**

## How Has Domestic Violence Been Supported Locally?

### Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society



### Cantara Safe House in Brooks



There was a considerable decrease in the number of individuals served because the Cantara Safe House began serving only the immediate community in Brooks to minimize exposure to COVID-19.

## Ways to Support Individuals Impacted by Domestic Violence **Increased Awareness**

Local agencies identified continued and increased public awareness campaigns as an important recommendation for bringing attention to domestic violence in the communities throughout Southeastern Alberta. Furthermore, continuing and expanding various community partnerships is essential in supporting domestic violence programming, as it broadens the reach of local expertise and makes it easier for the public to navigate support in Southeast Alberta.

**"Throughout the pandemic families faced even more barriers when accessing services, but we were able to advocate for clients in collaboration with other agencies to ensure they were still being supported. Going forward, community partnerships are essential to ensuring individuals at risk for domestic violence are still able to receive the support they need in a timely manner to keep themselves and their families alive."** - Natasha Carvalho, Executive Director, Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society

# At a Glance...

## Medicine Hat Police Statistics



### Break and Enter

Year	Business	Residence
2018	95	149
2019	58	124
2020	69	145



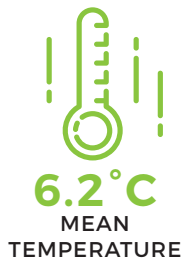
### Theft

Year	< \$5000	> \$5000
2018	753	35
2019	645	22
2020	651	21

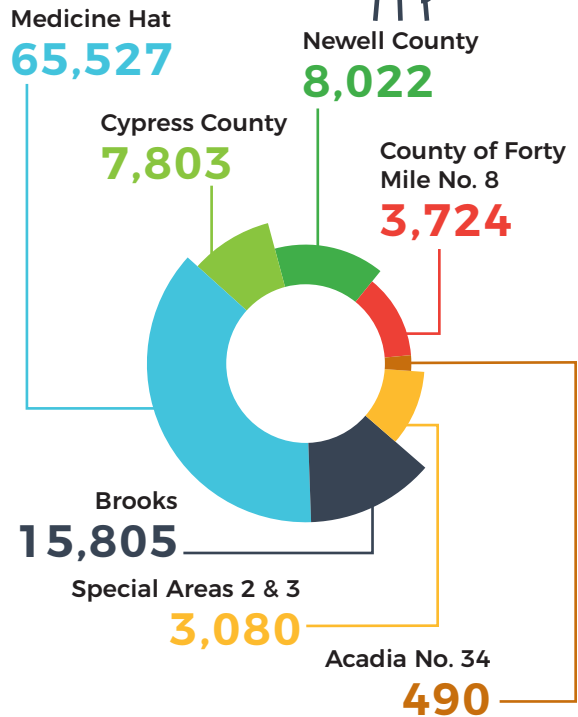


**Medicine Hat Voter Turnout**  
 2017: **34.6%**  
 2013: **40.2%**  
 Municipal Elections

## Medicine Hat Weather (2020)



## Populations (2020)



### 2019 Population

Medicine Hat	65,181	↑
Brooks	15,713	↑
Newell County	7,951	↑
County of Forty Mile No. 8	3,783	↓
Special Areas 2 & 3	3,081	↓
Acadia No. 34	496	↓
Cypress County	7,900	↓

## CFSEA Vital People

The **Vital People Award** aims to acknowledge, recognize, and encourage the staff and volunteers working in front line, program delivery, coordination, and junior management positions for local charities. The program supports these leaders in our community by investing in their success through two \$500 awards to assist with professional development opportunities that best suit the needs of the individuals. Congratulations to the 2021 recipients!

**Cody Weiss**  
 Friends of Medalta Society

**Shelby Haga**  
 Canadian Mental Health Association

## CFSEA Board of Directors

- Frances Barnes**, Board Chair
- Ajit Atwal**, Vice Chair
- Cody Ibbotson**, Treasurer
- Cheryl Pocsik**, Secretary
- Brenda Mercer**, Director
- David Andrews**, Director
- Glenda Hawthorne**, Director
- Jason Openo**, Director
- Jim MacArthur**, Director
- Jim van der Sloot**, Director
- Julie Friesen**, Director
- Matthew Lofgren**, Director
- Myrna Stark**, Director
- Stanley Sakamoto**, Director
- Tyler Pocsik**, Director



If you want to know more about how the Community Foundation of Southeastern Alberta supports mental health, work & economy, and vulnerable populations, please connect with us!

104, 430 - 6th Avenue SE, Medicine Hat, Alberta, T1A 2S8  
403-527-9038 | [www.cfsea.ca](http://www.cfsea.ca)    

## Sponsors



PRITCHARD & CO.  
LAW FIRM, LLP



## Vital Signs Project Team

Hannah Minor, Vital Signs Community Coordinator  
Sydney Ratzlaff, Community Engagement Coordinator  
Niki Gray, Acting Executive Director  
Danielle Semrau-McLean  
Glenda Hawthorne  
Jason Openo  
Karen Blewett  
Maxine Dies, Graphic Designer- Sandfly Marketing Inc.