

## Social Effects of COVID-19 – Review

### Purpose

This report reviews and summarizes findings on the social effects of COVID-19 on the City of Spruce Grove. It re-examines all topics previously covered in the April 2020, June 2020, and November 2020 Social Effects of COVID-19 reports developed by the Social Planning Section and answers the following research questions:

- What information from previous reports has changed?
- What topics have new information or data?
- What information has stayed constant?

Topics with new or changed information are covered in this report. See **Appendix A** for the list of all topics previously covered and researched for the purpose of this report.

### Methods and Limitations

The April, June, and November 2020 reports were reviewed and a list of all topics previously covered was compiled. Each topic was then individually researched and re-examined to identify any new data that had emerged, if any. The date range for review was January 2020 - January 18, 2021.

Data published by organizations (e.g., government bodies, World Health Organization (WHO), and the Conference Board of Canada), and academic articles were reviewed. National news outlets provide contextual examples of the data. Online information from primarily Canadian sources was gathered using topics from **Appendix A** and sorted by date. Non-Canadian sources utilized in the report included international organizations and subject matter experts.

Limitations of this report include the following:

- COVID-19 and the systems that are affected are complex and continually evolving. The total social effects of COVID-19, socially, will be discovered over time.
- Local data is less readily available.
- Many sources do not define ‘pre-pandemic levels’ which limits ability to compare across time or how long until those levels would be estimated to be back to that level.
- Methodologies used in peer-reviewed articles were not cross examined.
- As the pandemic progresses and the amount of available information grows, separating valid, current information from the deluge of misinformation becomes increasingly difficult for scientists, decision makers, and the general public (McKinley, 2020).
- Information is an accurate reflection of all data reviewed within the window of time research was conducted.
- Standard measurements may not exist across jurisdictions or for a specific topic (e.g., poverty).

## How does this data relate to the community of Spruce Grove?

Demographic Groups	
Individuals experiencing homelessness	10 individuals 219 at-risk of homelessness (Spruce Grove FCSS & Stony Plain FCSS, 2019)
Individuals experiencing poverty <sup>1</sup>	2,140 <sup>2</sup> (Statistics Canada, 2017)
Families experiencing poverty	1,325 at minimum <sup>3</sup> (City of Spruce Grove, 2020)
Women	21,430 (City of Spruce Grove Economic and Business Development, 2021 <sup>4</sup> )
Children (under 19)	12,295 (City of Spruce Grove Economic and Business Development, 2021)
Seniors (60+)	6,799 (City of Spruce Grove Economic and Business Development, 2021)
Immigrants	3,569 8.41% of Spruce Grove's population (City of Spruce Grove Economic and Business Development, 2021)
People with visible minority status <sup>5</sup>	3,635 (City of Spruce Grove Economic and Business Development, 2021)
Non-Profit Organizations	159 organizations (Government of Alberta, 2020a)
Urban Indigenous People	2,810 (Statistics Canada, 2017)

<sup>1</sup> There is not a standard measurement for poverty so data is scattered. Measurements may include: low-income measure, before tax; low-income measure, after tax; market basket measure.

<sup>2</sup> This figure is based on low-income measure, after tax (LIM-AT) (Statistics Canada, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> In Spruce Grove, the poverty line for a family of four is an annual household income of \$44,874. 1740 households earn less than \$40,000/year and 76.17% of households are families therefore  $76.17\% \times 1740 = 1,325$ . Cannot discern how many make between \$40,000 - \$44,874. This number is an estimate (City of Spruce Grove, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Demographic information was collected using the most recent data available from government sources. Original cite sources were not attainable for all sources referenced within this table. Numbers should be utilized as an estimation rather than specific data points on population numbers.

<sup>5</sup> This term is used by Statistics Canada in reporting demographic information but does not include individuals of Aboriginal descent (Statistics Canada, 2020a).

Young Adults (ages 20 - 24)	2,522 (City of Spruce Grove Economic and Business Development, 2021)
CERB Recipients	Approximately 32% of the City's population (City of Spruce Grove, 2020).

## Summary of the Social Effects of COVID-19

Group Affected or Social Issue	Report(s) it was Featured in	Summary of Effects
Access to Technology	June 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 94% of Canadians have access to the internet</li> <li>● Those that do not report the following reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Cost</li> <li>○ Equipment</li> <li>○ Unavailability of internet services</li> </ul> </li> <li>● 63% of Canadian households have less than one internet enabled device per person</li> </ul>
Addictions	June 2020 November 2020 January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strong link between mental health disorders and addiction</li> <li>● Vulnerable people with substance use disorders are experiencing increased isolation, anxiety and stress on top of the challenges in accessing supports and services they need due to public health measures</li> <li>● Toxicity of illegal drugs increased with border closures and disrupted supply chains</li> <li>● In July 2020, more opioid deaths in Alberta were recorded than any other month in province's history</li> </ul>
Childcare	November 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The \$25-a-day childcare pilot is being phased out, causing families additional financial stress during the pandemic</li> </ul>
Children	April 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Anyone under the age of 18 and reliant upon adults for care and support are being affected as their guardians face challenges from the pandemic</li> <li>● Most significant impact for children is the disruption in schooling, daycares, and extracurricular activities</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Virtual learning may not be an option for low-income families with limited access to technology and internet</li> </ul>
Domestic Violence and Child Abuse	April 2020 June 2020 January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pandemic is creating social conditions that put people at an increased risk of violence (e.g., reduced resources, strained finances, disconnection from social support systems, job loss, etc.)</li> <li>Calls to Parkland RCMP for domestic violence increased 9% in 2020 compared to 2019</li> </ul>
Food Access and Security	April 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12.9% of Albertans are food insecure and that food insecurity is more common in households with children. New immigrants, refugees, people with a disability, the LGBTQ2+ community and homeless populations are also at a higher risk of experiencing food insecurity</li> <li>Parkland Food Bank is providing hampers one a month by appointment to limit the spread of the virus and as a result of limited volunteer capacity</li> </ul>
Frontline workers	June 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased exposure to COVID-19 and mental health stressors</li> <li>Increases in depressive symptoms, anxiety, insomnia, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.</li> </ul>
Immigrants	April 2020 January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Language barriers can create challenges in understanding health advice and knowing how to get support</li> <li>Recent immigrants and individuals in racial or ethnic minorities also disproportionately living in poverty</li> <li>Increased incidences of racial discrimination occurring during the pandemic against Chinese-Canadians</li> </ul>
Individuals and families experiencing poverty	April 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People with lower incomes have less resources to prepare for and protect against the virus</li> <li>Their circumstances may not permit them to follow health advice, such as having low-income jobs that are not stable, cannot be done remotely, and do not have paid sick leave or benefits.</li> </ul>

Mental Health	April 2020 June 2020 November 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unemployment a key risk factor in mental health concerns and linked to suicide rates.</li> <li>The longer the pandemic lasts increases the impact on economic factors which negatively impact individuals' mental well-being.</li> <li>Mental health implications of the COVID-19 pandemic will likely last longer and affect a greater percentage of the population than the virus.</li> <li>73% of the Spruce Grove COVID Recovery Survey respondents indicated that support for mental health and addressing social isolation is important to them.</li> </ul>
Non-Profit Organizations	April 2020 June 2020 January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non-profits experiencing challenges with staff mental health, disruption of service, accessing and adjusting to technology, increased demand with lessening capacity, and decreased revenue</li> </ul>
People Experiencing Homelessness	April 2020 January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Those experiencing homelessness are unable to wash their hands as frequently, social distance, or isolate</li> <li>Increased risk of contracting the virus and having complications from co-morbidities</li> <li>They may face barriers to accessing health care by not having a health care card, address, or way to be contacted</li> <li>Safe isolation spaces external to shelters are being set up (e.g., hotels) to decrease the spread</li> </ul>
Seniors	April 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most likely to experience severe symptoms of COVID-19</li> <li>Demographic at greatest risk of social isolation</li> </ul>
Spread of Misinformation	November 2020 January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Misinformation tends to spread more rapidly than truth, is often more popular than accurate messages, and is very difficult to debunk once it has been spread</li> <li>It promotes unsafe behaviours that increase the spread of COVID-19 and cause poor physical and mental health outcomes</li> <li>41% of Spruce Grove residents are getting their main sources of COVID-19 information from social media</li> </ul>

Suicide Rates	November 2020 January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alberta has the highest rate of suicides in Canada</li> <li>Alberta crisis centres report increased numbers of suicide-related calls during pandemic</li> <li>Preliminary data shows suicide deaths in 2020 are trending below average, but this is subject to change as medical investigations are finalized</li> </ul>
Trust in Government	June 2020 January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Canadian's perceptions equally split on whether governments are telling the whole truth about COVID-19 or deliberately withholding information</li> <li>Albertans have the lowest satisfaction rates with provincial government pandemic measures</li> <li>Confidence in a government's ability to tackle a pandemic linked to higher compliance with public health measures</li> <li>Longer the pandemic persists, the more public trust in democracies and international organizations is expected to suffer</li> </ul>
Urban Indigenous people	June 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Income and social status is a determinant of health. Indigenous people face barriers to income and status due to colonialism, systemic racism, and intergenerational trauma.</li> <li>24% of urban Indigenous people are living in poverty (using Market Basket Measure) and 1 in 3 experience food insecurity</li> </ul>
Women	April 2020 November 2020 January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>COVID-19 is magnifying and exacerbating gender inequalities</li> <li>Women's participation in the workforce is at the lowest level in three decades</li> <li>Women averaging 95 hours/week caregiving during pandemic compared to 68 hours/week beforehand</li> <li>Women thought to be more susceptible to COVID-19 infections because of their typical professions; however, infection rates in Alberta are evenly distributed between females (50%) and males (50%)</li> </ul>
Youth & Young adults	June 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At a developmental stage where peer relationships are important to social</li> </ul>

		<p>development and growing independence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● This group is least likely to adhere to public health orders</li> <li>● Pandemic impacting youth and young adult education and employment</li> </ul>
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## The Economic Landscape

The emergence of COVID-19, and subsequent pandemic responses, sent the world into the deepest recession in modern times (The Conference Board of Canada, 2021). The health of the economy has direct effects on the social and physical well-being of individuals. Insights into the economic trends and landscape provides understanding of factors that are contributing to and intersecting with the social effects of the pandemic.

### Unemployment

Alberta's unemployment slightly improved in December 2020 to 11.0% (Government of Alberta, 2021a). This rate is still 4% higher compared to December 2019. Employment declines were most notable in construction; accommodation and food services; and, information, culture, and recreation sectors (Statistics Canada, 2021a). Alberta's unemployment rate continues to be the second highest in the country after Newfoundland and Labrador, and is higher than the current national unemployment rate of 8.6% (Statistics Canada, 2021a). Between February and October of 2020, 20,600 women fell out of the work force (meaning they are not counted) unemployment because they are not actively searching for work while nearly 68,000 men joined the workforce (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2021).

### Gross Domestic Product

The November 2020 Social Effects of COVID-19 report included information on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and how this indicator relates to recovery. Since that report, additional data on Canada's GDP was released by Statistics Canada. The graph below highlights that GDP continued to increase, but has not reached pre-pandemic levels seen in January and February 2020 (Statistics Canada, 2021b).



Table 1. Table 1. Aggregation of Canada's GDP, seasonally adjusted at annual rates, across all industries reported in the North American Industry Classification System (Statistics Canada, 2021b).

Alberta's anticipated GDP contraction has been updated to between 8.1-8.3% which is a slight improvement (Government of Alberta, 2020b; Royal Bank of Canada Economics, 2020). GDP is forecasted to increase by 4.5% as oil prices improve and oil production increases after the provincial government lifts curtailments (Royal Bank of Canada Economics, 2020). An increase of 4.5% and continuous improvement mean that Alberta's economy could recover to pre-pandemic levels in 2 years.

### Debt Load

The table below provides a snapshot of the average debt load in 2020 Q3 that Albertans were carrying and delinquency rate in comparison to the Canadian averages.

	Canada	Alberta	Difference
2020 Q3 Average Consumer Debt	\$23,237	\$28,405	\$5,168
Delinquency rate	0.98%	1.32%	0.34%

Table 1. Average consumer debt (excluding mortgages) and delinquency rates in Canada and Alberta.

The average consumer debt (excluding mortgages) in Canada in Quarter 3 of 2020 was \$23,237. The national 90+ day delinquency rate for non-mortgage debt dropped to 0.98%, the lowest level it's been since 2014. It is likely that this drop can be attributed in part to 3 million

Canadian consumers opting for payment deferral programs offered during the pandemic (Equifax Inc., 2020).

Albertan is above the national average for consumer debt load by over \$5,000. The delinquency rate is also above the average and is the third highest in the country behind New Brunswick and Newfoundland. It is important to recognize that these rates represent averages, and that the spread within the provinces can be large. For example, the average debt in Q3 2020 in Edmonton was \$27,633 (below provincial average) compared to Fort McMurray at \$39,811 (above average) (Equifax Inc., 2020).

## Fraud

Fraud is an intentional deceit to receive personal gain and includes things like identity theft, credit/debit card fraud, tax fraud, and COVID-19 fraud to name a few (Government of Canada, 2021a; Government of Canada 2020). The April 2020 report highlighted the warnings to people to be aware of COVID-19 related scams and frauds because of the increased use of technology.

Examples of reported COVID-19 fraud include, but are not limited to<sup>6</sup>:

- Telephone calls offering home vaccination kits by mail after paying large sums of money
- Emails from familiar addresses with malicious links or content related to COVID-19 vaccines that once clicked freeze your computer, make you call a toll-free number, and then they demand money to unfreeze your account
- Private companies offering fast COVID-19 tests for sale (Government of Canada, 2021e).

Between March 6, 2020 and November 30, 2020 there was:

- 8,064 reports of COVID-19 fraud in Canada
- 6,526 victims of COVID-19 fraud in Canada
- \$6.8 Million lost in COVID-19 fraud and scams in Canada (Government of Canada, 2021b).

In Spruce Grove, there were 290 reports of fraud in 2020, which is up 6% from 2019 (Parkland RCMP, 2021).

## The Social Landscape

A key finding to highlight upfront, is that while the pandemic is affecting all people, it is not doing so equally. Factors such as access to resources, employment and income, and overall health and wellbeing prior to the pandemic are contributing to the disproportionate impacts. Additionally, the pandemic continues to exacerbate issues around mental health, addictions,

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<sup>6</sup> A comprehensive list of COVID-19 fraud can be found at: <https://www.antifraudcentre-centreantifraude.ca/features-vedette/2020/covid-19-eng.htm>

suicide, and lack of trust in government. Spread of misinformation and rising COVID-19 cases are also straining the social landscape.

### **Disproportionate Impacts on Certain Population Segments**

#### *Women*

The April 2020 report noted that COVID-19 is having a disproportionately negative impact on women because many jobs with higher levels of exposure also have a high ratio of female workers including health care, social work, or grocery stores. The Government of Canada also notes that women are disproportionately more likely to be diagnosed with COVID-19 and slightly more likely to die from COVID-19, partly reflecting the older age of diagnosed women in their GBA+ summary of Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan (Government of Canada, 2021d).

In Alberta, the rate of infections between the sexes is 50% in females and 50% males (Government of Alberta, 2021b). Sex-disaggregated mortality data in Alberta is not publically available; however, the average age of death of COVID-19 patients in Alberta is 82 years old, and 62.4% of infections in those 80+ years old are female (Government of Alberta, 2021b). These trends are seen across Canada as well; 51.6% infections are in females, and of those that are 80+ years old, 66.1% are female (Government of Canada, 2021f). Globally, confirmed COVID-19 cases are distributed 50% in females and 50% in males too; however, males comprise a higher proportion of hospitalizations (54%), ICU admissions (68%), and deaths (58%) (Global Health 50/50, 2020).

#### *People Experiencing Homelessness*

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on people experiencing homelessness remain the same as in previous reports although local actions to help people experiencing homelessness have adapted to respond. Shelters were determined to be an essential service early in the COVID-19 pandemic. Shelters are shared accommodations which increases the risk of transmitting the COVID-19 virus among individuals within the shelter. Alberta Health Services (2020) worked with communities to determine safe isolation spaces external to the shelters to decrease the spread of the virus. These isolation spaces need to be approved by the Medical Officer of Health and include the use of commercial spaces like hotels, motels and inns to isolate (Alberta Health Services, 2020).

#### *Immigrants*

The April 2020 report highlighted that immigrants and newcomers from non-English speaking Countries to Canada could experience challenges with COVID-19 because of the language barrier. A recent study also highlighted that New Canadians are experiencing safety concerns linked with racism and discrimination. The Institute for Canadian Citizenship found that:

- 27% of new Canadians are worried about wearing a mask in public

- 63% of new Canadians are worried about taking public transit

A University of Alberta study found that 64% of Chinese-Canadians reported some level of disrespect during the pandemic and 43% said they had been directly intimidated or threatened (McMaster, 2020). Discrimination is taking place in person but also online (Statistics Canada, 2020b). Canadians experiencing discrimination have reported having a weaker sense of belonging in their community as well as less trust in institutions (Statistics Canada, 2020b).

In another survey completed by Statistics Canada (LaRochelle-Côté & Uppal, 2020) in April 2020, immigrants (12%) were almost twice as likely as Canadian born respondents (7%) to be worried about the possibility of domestic violence during the pandemic.

### Addictions

As of the end of October, 2020, there have been 1,028 unintentional drug poisoning deaths across the province; 904 of these deaths were specifically from opioids, and 368 of these deaths occurred in the Edmonton zone. In July 2020, more opioid deaths were recorded than in any other month in Alberta's history. From August to October, 2020, opioid overdose deaths decreased by 33% but still remained higher than pre-pandemic levels (Mertz, 2020; Government of Alberta, 2020c).

In December, the [Alberta Substance Use Surveillance System](#) tool went live. It is an online dashboard updated monthly with 14 tabs of searchable data related to substance use so that community agencies, primary care networks, and partners can have more data to help understand trends, create better measures to support recovery, and ultimately help to protect the lives of those struggling with substance use (Mertz, 2020).

### Suicide Rates

The November 2020 report noted that Alberta has the highest suicide rate in Canada and that although suicide-related calls to crisis centers increased in 2020, preliminary data suggests that suicide deaths in 2020 are below average. Both 2019 and 2020 suicide data is still subject to change as medical investigations are finalized (Franklin, 2020). The full picture of how COVID-19 impacted suicide rates in Alberta will take a few years to be clear.

### Rising COVID-19 Cases

As of January 18, 2021, all of Alberta continues to be under "enhanced" status where additional lockdown measures are in place. Spruce Grove has recorded 61 active cases and 2 deaths (Government of Alberta, 2021b).

The COVID-19 virus is mutating and the longer it takes to vaccinate people, the increased likelihood that a variant could emerge that eludes current tests, treatments, and vaccines (The Associated Press, 2021). Health officials are also concerned that changes in the virus could lead to reinfections of COVID-19. Although this is currently rare, there has been a confirmed case in

Brazil of a person being infected a second time with a new variant of COVID-19 (The Associated Press, 2021).

The new variants of it are being detected in Alberta. As of January 12, 2021, there are 5 cases of the U.K. variant reported in Alberta (Boothby, 2021). On January 8, 2021, Canada's first case of the South African variant (estimated to be 70% more infectious than the common strain) was reported in an Alberta who had recently traveled (Franklin, 2021).

### **Prevention Guidelines**

The newest prevention recommendation is to receive the COVID-19 vaccine when eligible to do so to prevent the spread (Government of Canada, 2021c). An estimated 72% of Canadians indicate that they will get the vaccine in 2021 (Leger, 2021). Vaccines have been distributed across Canada (Government of Canada, 2021c). Alberta is rolling out a phased immunization program<sup>7</sup>:

- Phase 1: December 2020 - February 2021
  - Immunizations offered to key populations including: front line health care workers; long term care and supportive living residents and staff; seniors 75 years and over; and, First Nations, Métis and persons 65 years of age and over living in a First Nations community or Metis Settlement
- Phase 2: April - September 2021
  - Continuation of targeting populations at risk; work to identify sequencing is underway and decisions are expected to be made in the coming weeks
- Phase 3: Fall 2021
  - Start of roll-out to the general public (Government of Alberta, 2021c)

### **Trust in Government and Spread of Misinformation**

According to a recent poll<sup>8</sup>, Albertans have the lowest satisfaction rates with their provincial government's pandemic measures; 69% of Albertans are dissatisfied. For reference, the second lowest satisfaction comes from Ontario with 40% of residents being dissatisfied (Leger, 2021). Evidence suggests that confidence in a government's ability to tackle a pandemic is linked to higher compliance with public health measures (Wright, Steptoe, & Fancourt, 2020). It is so significant that trust in government is one of the largest behavioural predictors of compliance during the pandemic, larger than other factors such as social isolation, loneliness, and mental health (Fancourt, 2021; Wright, Steptoe, & Fancourt, 2020). Compliance can be increased when there is trust and confidence in a government that assures its citizens that guidelines are effective and necessary (Van Bavel, et. al., 2020; Wright, Steptoe, & Fancourt, 2020).

Additionally, research suggests that the longer the pandemic persists, the more that public trust

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<sup>7</sup> Timeline is subject to change based upon vaccine supply

<sup>8</sup> Leger is the largest Canadian-owned polling and marketing research firm. Results are from a web survey of a representative sample of 1,506 Canadians over the age of 18 between the dates of December 30th, 2020 and January 3, 2021 (Leger, 2021).

in democracies and international organizations (e.g., the United Nations and NATO) are expected to suffer (Berthiaume, 2021).

Research has noted the spread of COVID-19 misinformation linked with other types of information on social media including: themes tying the pandemic to mistrust in government and media; conspiracy theories; and, beliefs questioning authority (Quinn, Fazel, and Peters, 2020). Belief in this information is related to non-adherence with pandemic health measures (Coroiu et. al., 2020).

### **Non-profit Organizations**

The Alberta Nonprofit Network (ABNN) has completed three surveys about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic to the nonprofits in Alberta. The most recent ABNN report provides the results from a province-wide survey conducted between October 26, 2020 and November 6, 2020 and received a total of 500 responses<sup>9</sup> (ABNN, 2020). .

There were three trends identified by the ABNN's most recent survey:

- Staff mental health is a key concern
- Working in more complex environments with access to fewer resources, increased demand and lessening capacity
- Financial resources are integral to being able to deliver on their mission in the next 12 months (ABNN, 2020)

The top 3 operational challenges nonprofits reported facing are:

- Staff mental health
- Challenges accessing technology
- Challenges understanding Alberta Health operating guidelines (ABNN, 2020)

Another notable finding was that 74% of nonprofit organizations that completed the survey reported that their revenue has decreased over the course of the pandemic (ABNN, 2020).

### **Domestic Violence**

In the April and June reports, there was limited local data about domestic violence in the tri-municipal region. The limited local data showed that there was no increase in reported incidents comparing April 2019 and April 2020. The Parkland Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) provided the annual data for 2020 and qualitative data about some of the barriers being faced in the tri-municipal region. In 2019, the Parkland RCMP had 1555 calls for domestic violence and 394 calls for domestic violence with charges. In 2020, the total calls for domestic

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<sup>9</sup> As the context for nonprofit organizations is constantly changing, the survey responses are not intended to be representative of the entire sector or region. The organizations that responded to the survey are connected to the ABNN which could skew the data received (ABNN, 2020).

violence increased to 1697 calls, approximately 9%. The domestic violence calls with charges decreased to 321 calls (Internal Communication, January 2021).

### **Emerging Local Data**

#### **211**

There are two tools used locally by service providers and residents to connect with the resource they need: 211 and Helpseeker.

211 is a free service that helps Albertans connect with the right resource via phone, text, and online chat.

- In Dec. 2020 there were 44 contacts with 211 from Spruce Grove residents
- 14/44 (32%) were COVID-19 related contacts
- 15 referrals were made by 211
- From the 14 contacts that were COVID-19 related, 82 needs were identified
  - 37/82 (45%) needs were categorized as Organizational/Community/International Services
  - 12/82 (15%) needs were categorized as Income Support and Education (211 Alberta, 2020).

#### *Helpseeker*

Helpseeker is a web and mobile-based app to help connect individuals to the correct resource (Helpseeker, 2020). In December 2020 the top 5 categories searched in Spruce Grove were:

- COVID-19
- Suicide
- Domestic Violence
- Human Trafficking
- Advocacy Help

#### *Spruce Grove FCSS Data*

In 2020, the FCSS Case Management Program supported 162 clients, including 89 new assessments. The top three presenting issues at assessment were:

- Financial
- Mental Health
- Housing

The Regional Housing Program launched on September 8, 2020. Of the 29 new assessments, 7 clients have been successfully supported to find new housing, 10 clients have been successfully supported to prevent housing breakdown, and the remaining clients are either still working with the coordinator, have resolved their own issue, or have lost contact.

Spruce Grove FCSS had a total of 3,242 points of contact in 2020 through: phone, walk-in's, email, voicemail follow-ups; multiple contacts with the same individuals; and, those seeking assistance through FCSS programs and services. The primary presenting issues were for tax support, counselling, financial, and housing/homeless (S. Tunney, personal communication, January 21, 2021).

### **Schools**

As of January 18, 2020, across Alberta there is one school with an outbreak of 10+ cases, 3 schools with outbreaks of 5-9 cases, 60 schools under "alerts" with 2-4 cases, and the remainder are considered "open" (Government of Alberta, 2021d). In Spruce Grove, all schools are open without any reported outbreaks.

## **Social Policy Responses to COVID-19**

The social policy response is viewed from a holistic frame that includes formal policy and legislation changes, practices, and activities specifically targeted to address social factors that are being exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It includes financial supports, public safety measures, and paradigm-shifting policies that are receiving renewed interest as they could contribute to recovery efforts and alleviating stressors Canadians are experiencing.

### **Alberta Social Policy Response**

#### *Face Coverings*

The Government of Alberta made masks mandatory in all indoor public spaces and workplaces on Dec. 8, 2020 (Government of Alberta, 2020e). This supersedes municipal bylaws that were in place including the City of Spruce Grove's Temporary Mandatory Face Coverings Bylaw (bylaw # C-1128-20).

#### *Restrictions*

In response to rising COVID-19 case numbers and strain on the healthcare system, the provincial government declared a State of Public Health Emergency and announced new, aggressive restrictions on December 8, 2020 to slow the spread of the virus (Romero, 2020; Government of Alberta, 2021e). All indoor and outdoor social gatherings were prohibited (with enforceable fines of \$1,000); businesses were either closed, restricted to curbside or deliveries, or reduced to 15% occupancy capacity; work from home became mandatory for those able to do so; and, masks were made mandatory across the province (Romero, 2020; Government of Alberta, 2021e). As of January 18, outdoor gatherings up to 10 people are permitted and personal and wellness services can open by appointment; the other restrictions remain in place (Government of Alberta, 2021e).

#### *Grants*

The provincial government has launched the Small and Medium Enterprise Relaunch Grant to provide financial assistance to businesses, cooperatives, and nonprofits that were ordered to close or reduce their operations because of COVID-19 and experienced a revenue reduction of at least 30% (Government of Alberta, 2021f). Up to \$20,000 per applicant is available to help offset a portion of the health measures or relaunch costs which could include:

- physical barriers
- purchasing personal protective equipment and disinfecting supplies
- paying rent and employee wages
- replacing inventory and more (Government of Alberta, 2021f)

The Civil Society Fund has allocated \$7 million in one-time funding to support pandemic recovery efforts. Eligible applicants include: nonprofit and voluntary organizations, registered charities, informal groups or movements pursuing shared interests or values and private-sector organizations and individuals pursuing social good (Government of Alberta, 2020e).

## **Federal Policy Response**

### *Economic Response Plan*

The Federal Government introduced Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan to support Canadians and businesses facing challenges as a result of the pandemic. Funding streams are available to individuals, businesses, sectors, organizations helping Canadians, and the provinces and territories. Approximately \$23.2 billion, or 10% of the value of the Economic Response Plan measures, is being split between: students, seniors, families, women, children, homelessness, disabled persons, food insecure households, vulnerable Canadians, and entrepreneurs (Government of Canada, 2021d). For a full list funding amounts and allocations, see [Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan](#) website.

## **Conclusion**

This report has explored all previous topics included in the April, June, and November 2020 Social Effects of COVID-19 reports and provided updated information. This report aims to equip local decision makers with consolidated information about how the social landscape in Spruce Grove has been affected by the pandemic so that community support through this crisis and during recovery can align with the current context. Additional questions and research requests pertaining to the social effects of the pandemic can be emailed to the [Social Planning Unit](#).

## References

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## Appendix A - Summary of Report Topics and Updates

The table below includes a summary of all topics reported on in the April, June, and November 2020 Social Effects of COVID-19 reports. All topics were re-examined to see if any new or updated information is available for them; if so, then they were included in this report. If not, then they were identified as being consistent with no new information to report and left out of this final report. Note: the topics are listed in alphabetical order.

Topic	Covered in April, June, and/or November Reports	Research Findings
AB policy response	April	New data or updated information
Access to tech	June	Consistent; no new information to report
Addictions	June, November	New data or updated information
Alberta Relaunch	June	Consistent; no new information to report
CERB to EI	November	Consistent; no new information to report
Childcare	November	Consistent; no new information to report
Children	April	Consistent; no new information to report
City of Spruce Grove policy response	April	New data or updated information
Debt load	April	New data or updated information
Domestic Abuse and Child Abuse	April, June	Consistent; no new information to report
Economy	April, June, November	New data or updated information
Emerging local data	June	New data or updated information
Face coverings bylaws	November	New data or updated information
FCSS data	April	New data or updated information
Federal Policy Response	April, November	New data or updated information
Financial Vulnerability	June	Consistent; no new information to report

Food Access and security	April	Consistent; no new information to report
Frontline workers	June	Consistent; no new information to report
GDP	November	New data or updated information
Guaranteed basic income	November	Consistent; no new information to report
Immigrants	April	New data or updated information
Individuals and families experiencing poverty	April	Consistent; no new information to report
Mental Health	April, June, November	New data or updated information
Non-profit orgs	April, June	New data or updated information
Other	April	New data or updated information
People Experiencing Homelessness	April	New data or updated information
Pharmacare Plan	November	Consistent; no new information to report
Poverty by the numbers	April	Consistent; no new information to report
Prevention Guidelines	November	Consistent; no new information to report
Rentals and home ownership	April	Consistent; no new information to report
Rising cases (2nd wave)	November	New data or updated information
School Re-entry	November	New data or updated information
Seniors	April	Consistent; no new information to report
Spread of Misinformation	November	New data or updated information
Suicide Rates	November	New data or updated information
Trust in Government	June	New data or updated information

Unemployment	April, June, November	New data or updated information
Urban Indigenous Impacts	June	Consistent; no new information to report
Women	April, November	Consistent; no new information to report
Youth and Young Adults	June	New data or updated information