



# POLICY

## SOCIAL RESILIENCE

SEPTEMBER 9, 2021

In 2021, Calgary stands at a crossroads. Over the past eighteen months, the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare wide-ranging economic and social injustices both locally and around the world. Now, as a community, we must decide how we will respond.

In 2020, over [one-third of eligible Albertans](#) (workers who earned more than \$5,000 in 2019) received CERB payments, slightly over the national average. However, there are stories of tens of thousands of struggling families beneath these aggregated statistics – families who likely faced precarious financial situations even before the pandemic. These families who worked hard for independence and financial sustainability have been pushed into crisis.

At the same time, hate incidents have become more and more common across our country, rendering racialized Canadians and members of religious minorities [increasingly unsafe](#). In parallel, we are witnessing the beginnings of a new reckoning with systemic racism, with a particular focus on Islamophobia, anti-Indigenous and anti-black racism. Recent discoveries of unmarked graves at former residential school sites have heightened already urgent calls for acknowledging the truth of Indigenous peoples' horrific treatment in Canada. Following from this, we see increased calls to action on reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Women in Calgary and across Canada have been [disproportionately impacted](#) by the pandemic, as childcare and related responsibilities have tended to unfairly [fall on them](#).

In the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing crisis of opioid overdoses has continued and worsened. [In 2020](#), over 1,150 Albertans died from opioid overdoses, almost double the figure for 2019. In Calgary alone, nearly 400 individuals died from these overdoses, up 72% from 2019. Furthermore, social isolation and other pandemic restriction impacts have contributed to heightened prevalence of mental health concerns across our community.

The pandemic has also underscored issues of accessibility for people with disabilities. Due to their specific needs, many people with disabilities have suffered disproportionately from reduced access to care, services, employment, and educational opportunities.

For Calgary to be a truly resilient city, we must take meaningful action to address these and other disparities within our communities. As many Calgarians possess more than one marginalized identity, an intersectional approach is the essential foundation for any effective approach aimed at enhancing our city's social resilience.

We must be innovative and not shy away from making needed changes to our local institutions. Though municipal jurisdiction is not infinite, it provides a number of opportunities to effect these changes through the City's roles as a regulator, service provider, funder, and our community's largest single employer. Beyond this, there are substantial opportunities for collaboration with other orders of government.

Today, the City has many advisory committees, policies, initiatives, and strategies related to equity and inclusion. For example, in 2020, as part of Calgary's commitment to becoming an anti-racist city, Council established the Anti-Racism Action Committee (ARAC). This new committee joined others, such as the Social Wellbeing Advisory Committee, the Calgary Aboriginal Urban Affairs Committee, and the Advisory Committee on Accessibility. In addition to advisory bodies, Council has approved a huge number of policies and strategies intended to address equity concerns, such as *White Goose Flying*, the *Social Wellbeing Policy*, and the recently-approved *A Community of Connections: Calgary's Mental Health and Addictions Strategy*.

For reasons such as administrative silos, inadequate resourcing, narrow conceptions of equity, and other systemic barriers, these committees and documents have not been able to affect the changes that Calgarians deserve. Making tangible progress on improving equity for Calgarians entails nothing less than fundamental changes to funding priorities, as well as changes to municipal operating practices.

These problems of equity will not be solved overnight. Making progress towards a more just future is a long-term, ongoing project. Mistakes will be made along the way, and as a result of this reality, sustained reflection and dialogue will be key to building the community we wish to pass on to future generations. The goal must be to empower citizens with lived experience whom we have appointed to committees to identify the ways to disrupt and change our systems and processes.

To assist Calgary in making greater strides towards a more equitable future, we must place equity at the center of our budgeting process, commit to evolving a progressive police force, and prioritize resources for truth and reconciliation. We must also prioritize and advocate for services needed by marginalized populations, such as public transit and safe consumption sites.

## **Advancing equity and resilience through the municipal budget**

The City must fully integrate equity considerations into its 2023-2026 service plans and budgets. Capital investments have the potential to enhance equity by improving marginalized Calgarians' access to services and opportunities.

Each service line (such as Public Transit, Parks or Open Spaces) must clearly articulate its contributions towards advancing equity in our communities alongside tangible metrics to demonstrate progress over time.

Council's own decision making must incorporate the lens of resilience, ensuring that citizens are well served by a thoughtful process that looks to economic, social and environmental impacts of actions.

## Evolving a progressive police force

All Calgarians deserve fair treatment by their public institutions, especially from their police service. To keep all our neighbours safe, the City must enable the Calgary Police Service to partner with organizations best able to address complex social issues through both preventative and crisis-oriented support services.

The Calgary Police Service (CPS) itself has [recognized](#) that police are not necessarily well-equipped to respond to all service calls, and that preventative approaches must be employed to reduce demands on police resources. Many calls involving individuals experiencing severe mental health-related distress may be better responded to by other professionals such as social workers. This is why in 2020, CPS committed to [independently reallocate](#) \$8 million from its budget to programs such as the Police and Crisis Team (PACT) and other alternative response programs. This is also why Council separately established the Community Safety Investment Framework (CSIF) during its November 2020 budget deliberations, with a one-time allocation of \$8 million dollars from reserves.

Following evaluation of initial funding allocations, permanent funding streams must be identified for the Community Safety Investment Framework (CSIF), to ensure the right first responders are responding to the appropriate service calls.

Council must also ensure that citizen appointments to Calgary Police Commission are rooted in reflecting Calgary's diverse communities. Rather than a corporatized approach to oversight, Calgary Police Commission should embrace its recent evolution towards exercising governance that prioritizes inclusion, equity and diversity as foundational principles of policing.

## Advancing truth and reconciliation

Calgary's response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, the [White Goose Flying](#) report, was released in 2016. Nearly five years later, it is clear that Council has not yet allocated sufficient resources to implement the report's recommendations in a timely manner. Council must move to approve [the necessary funding](#), in particular for the City's Indigenous Affairs Office, to rectify the situation.

Furthermore, a portion of all City land sale proceeds should be allocated towards the building of an Indigenous gathering place within Calgary, a clear recommendation within *White Goose Flying*. Following this project's completion, these funds should be allocated to relevant capital projects that advance truth and reconciliation within our city.

While *White Goose Flying* was a start on the path to reconciliation, there is more work to do to ensure that all Indigenous voices are heard. Particularly with relation to an evolving urban environment that has shifted considerably since 2016, we must ensure that present day issues are understood, recommendations made and actions taken.

## Restoring transit service

Many marginalized Calgarians, particularly those with low incomes, rely on public transit to access employment, education, healthcare, leisure opportunities, and social networks. Currently, **no part of our city** receives the 'Primary Transit Network' level of service envisioned by the Calgary Transportation Plan (frequency of 10 minutes or less, 15 hours a day, 7 days a week). This is primarily due to budget reductions in recent years.

To support our economic recovery and to improve ease of transportation for all Calgarians, the City must move to restore Primary Transit Network levels of service to LRT lines and select bus lines. Service levels should be restored as part of Council's November 2021 budget adjustments and sustained into the 2023-2026 budget cycle.

## Supporting harm reduction in our communities

Addressing harm reduction in Calgary is not just a matter of creating more treatment facilities and having more beds available. People who use drugs are often labelled as addicts, causing our focus to shift toward addiction treatment rather than preventing overdose deaths. Ignoring overdoses and looking only toward recovery is leading to a disturbing number of Calgarians dying.

Experts in the field have told us repeatedly that their vulnerable clients need immediate access to supervised consumption sites within a 500-meter radius of their facilities that provide drop-in and shelter services. This type of access reduces overdose deaths, needle debris, and drug use in public areas. Harm reduction of this immediate nature is required to supplement broader strategies around opioid agonist treatment (OAT), mental health supports, and detoxification programs.

Safe consumption sites are part of the complex concept of harm reduction that requires collaborative solutions informed by compassionate public policy. While safe consumption sites are critical in saving lives, the key lies with location and supports for members of the community who live or work near these sites.