

"Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success."

- Henry Ford

Summary

Community is core to our purpose. It is where the interests of government, business, and citizens converge. The organizations that make up Calgary's social safety net are so varied and enmeshed in our society that rarely do we think of them as their own sector, but when they are seen as one they are often described as the social sector. Despite the name, this sector impacts more than just social elements of our society, but has a direct economic impact on our environment. Ingrained within the community, the social service sector works at the intersection of all of societies interests and directly impacts the well-being of our province.

What is the Social Sector?

The Social Sector maintains a breadth of expertise spanning various topic areas, but the one aligning principle of all organizations is that they are built on the interest of making life better for people. Collectively, social sector organizations generate significant benefit to our communities. The breadth of services and support they provide range dramatically, encompassing, as a sample, the categories below:

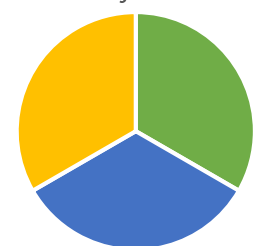
- **Community Building:** Coordinating, gathering, and representing community interests.
- **Domestic Violence:** Implementing supports systems to combat interpersonal relationship violence.
- **Education/Job Training:** Facilitating the delivery of education and job training opportunities.
- **Employment Assistance:** Guiding individuals through career difficulties.
- **Food, Clothing & Shelter:** Providing basic necessities of life to individuals and families in need.
- **Homelessness:** Collaborating in system changes to combat homelessness in our communities.
- **Indigenous Reconciliation:** Partnering in the healing of intergenerational trauma.
- **Mental Health Support:** Helping strengthen those struggling with mental health issues.
- **Policy Advocacy:** Cross-sectional advocacy and coordination of important community issues.
- **Senior Supports:** Supporting seniors to age gracefully during transitional life periods.
- **Youth Supports:** Setting up youth to stay on track during volatile life changes.

Economic and Social Impacts of the Social Sector

The Social Sector impacts larger society economically, in physical well-being, and socially. Often we focus on one lens separate from the others, whereas understanding that all aspects of impact are crucial to creating sustainable and permanent changes in our society. It being key in grasping not only the nature of societal change but as well the significance of breadth and depth of impact of the social sector across our communities.

It is commonly understood that quality of life is built on the pillars of economic, health, and social well-being. We tend to evaluate both economic and health well-being more so commonly due to the nature of its aggregable data, and social well-being not so readily due to the nature of social evaluation representing data generally across more unique and individual impact stories.

Quality of Life



- Economic Well-Being
- Health Well-Being
- Social Well-Being



That being said, each form of impact and evaluation, aggregable or unique, has significant value, and the social sector's influence in all of these areas is wide ranging.

Examples of Economic Contributions

- The Non-profit/Voluntary sector contributes \$33.4 billion in total expenditures to the Alberta economy.
- Approximately 450,000 Albertans are employed in the sector, and 1.4 million Albertans volunteer across cultural sectors.
- A volunteer providing unskilled labour donates approximately \$3,220 in-kind annually to the Alberta environment.

Examples of Health Contributions

- The sector provides services that improve the quality of healthcare, and address gaps. Example in point, supporting Albertan hospital foundations and healthcare auxiliary groups.
- Providing multi-sectoral collaboration across service providers, and research and government institutions in examples like the Alberta Addiction & Mental Health Research Partnership Program.

Examples of Social Contributions

- Development of municipal poverty reduction strategies in both the Calgary Enough for All and End Poverty Edmonton strategies.
- Providing multi-disciplinary services and programs to individuals and families in emergency and vulnerable situations in examples such as the Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Center, C5 Edmonton, and the Waypoints Community Service Association.

*Note: Due to Government of Alberta reporting requirements, the non-profit/voluntary sector cannot be parsed into social sector specific data.
Note 2: Above diagram information populated from the Government of Alberta 'Profiling the Nonprofit/Voluntary Sector in Alberta' 2018 report.*

Conclusion

There is a real appetite for many in our society to get involved and to learn about how to become more engaged as a citizen, as people no longer expect that governments can and should solve social issues alone. Further, there is an increased awareness and willingness to integrate community, business, and government to help collectively solve social issues.

Community is the place in which individuals find their voice, to create the kind of world in which they want to live, to work and to raise a family. And the social sector thrives in this realm, acting as a resource to bring varied interests together.

Working in the areas of intersection between economic, political, and social environments the social sector leverages community experience, business partners, and government relationships resulting in its positioning as a powerful change maker in our society. Utilizing tools such as social entrepreneurship, social finance, and social innovation, and through partnership within communities, the place where one individual has the power to make a difference, the social sector provides a unique value to both business and political spheres that are trying to successfully engage with communities and one another.

The end result, the social sector is a significant influencer across the three pillars of wellbeing via its positive impacts on the economy, the health of our citizens, and the social support available to them across their journey. Leveraging the social sector as a partner in initiatives results in better and more comprehensive solutions for all parties involved.

