



# The UCP Platform & Potential Implications to Alberta's Nonprofit Sector

*This summary and analysis was prepared by Volunteer Alberta.*

## INTRODUCTION

The April 2019 provincial election led to a change of power in Alberta, and with the United Conservative Party (UCP) taking over four years of Alberta New Democratic Party (NDP) government, there are significant policy changes in sight.

One of ABNN's mandates is to foster strong relationships with government partners to address strategic priorities pertinent to Alberta's nonprofit sector. Part of this work means building the sector's capacity to represent themselves to the government.

This document highlights the priorities of the new government based on the [UCP Platform](#) that are the most likely to impact the nonprofit voluntary sector (NPVS) in Alberta. The document is organized by ministry, with page number references to the UCP Party Platform.

## MINISTRY OF CULTURE, MULTICULTURALISM & STATUS OF WOMEN

The Community Engagement Branch of Government of Alberta sits under this ministry, serving as the government's liaison with NPVS. In a section titled "Harnessing the Power of Civil Society<sup>1</sup>," on pages 71 and 72, the UCP platform makes several policy proposals regarding the relationship between the sector and the provincial government.

### Funding & Government-Sector Partnerships

The UCP vows to partner with civil society organizations "whenever possible" in service delivery (page 72). The platform brings up the possibility of switching to 5-year funding agreements.

In addition, the UCP platform makes a financial pledge to the sector as it promises to create "a \$20 million Civil Society Fund" supported by the Alberta Lotteries Fund to support innovative, cost-shared programs delivered by community groups" (page 72). The UCP platform pledges to facilitate equal access to government grants, awards and contributions for faith-based charities and nonprofits (page 72).

The government has indicated that they will maintain charitable tax credit at its current level (page 72), the status of which had been uncertain in the past.

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<sup>1</sup> The title of the section evidences UCP's preference to use the term "civil society" as opposed to "nonprofit sector."



A key proposal of the UCP platform for the sector is the creation of a “Premier’s Charities Council” in order to “advise the government on how best to assist the efforts of civil society groups” (page 72). However, it is currently unclear how this council would differ from the current form and function of Alberta Nonprofit / Voluntary Sector Initiative (ANVSI).

On social innovation and finance, the UCP platform pledges to “Support projects like the Alberta Social Venture Initiative, and the Trio Foundation’s Social EnterPrize (...)” (page 72).

### **Volunteerism**

On volunteerism, the UCP proposes the creation of “a weekly Points of Light Award to recognize outstanding groups or individuals who exemplify Alberta’s spirit of volunteerism” (page 72). It is unclear whether these awards are intended to replace the annual [Stars of Alberta](#) awards. Furthermore, research including a recent report from [Propellus](#) suggests that the majority of volunteers prefer a simple demonstration of gratitude as recognition for their efforts..

### **Women**

This ministry’s portfolio includes status of women. The UCP platform promises to “Expand the Women Building Futures program with \$10 million over four years to support women who wish to pursue opportunities in the skilled trades” (page 63).

### **Red Tape Reduction**

In line with the UCP’s campaign promises to reduce “red tape”, the government pledges to remove regulatory obstacles that hamper civil society. They give the examples of Harvest Healing Centre Church being prevented from sheltering homeless due to a lack of adequate sprinkler system and the City of Calgary disposing the sandwiches made by a Hutterite colony during Calgary floods of 2013 due to health regulations (page 71).

Based on these examples, the UCP proposes to enact the “Freedom to Care Act” in order to allow for charitable and nonprofit groups to “apply for a “common sense exemption” from regulations that are designed primarily for commercial application where those regulations have the unintended consequence of preventing a social good from being performed” (page 72).



## ASSOCIATE MINISTRY OF RED TAPE

Reduction of red tape is a large focus for the UPC, and as such, the UCP cabinet features an Associate Minister of Red Tape. As part of this portfolio, the UCP government promised to (pages 24 and 25):

- Pass a Red Tape Reduction Act to measure, report, and reduce the province's regulatory decisions to be made.
- Implement a "One-In / One-Out" rule requiring ministries to identify at least one offsetting regulation for every new regulation created.
- Move from a process to outcome-based regulatory approach.

As referenced above, the UCP platform further cites "red tape" as an impediment to the work of civil society organizations on page 71.

**Opportunity for NPVS:** When possible, the NPVS could help to inform discussions regarding the government's focus on reducing and/or removing government regulation related to the sector. One immediate opportunity would be for NPVS to complete the Alberta Government recently released a '[Cut Red Tape' survey](#).

## MINISTRY OF FINANCE

Commitments regarding the provincial finances is at the core of UCP's agenda. Overall, the UCP's main goal is to balance the budget without increasing taxes.

UCP's first priority was to eliminate the provincial carbon tax (pages 17 and 18). The elimination of the carbon tax could help lower the operating costs for nonprofit organizations. On the other hand, the organizations benefiting from energy efficiency programs under Energy Efficiency Alberta will see them terminated.

UCP's next target is to gradually reduce business tax rate from 12% to 8% (page 19). Finally, the government's goal is to achieve a budget surplus by the end of its 4-year term, while promising to "maintain operating spending at current levels" (page 101).

The reduction of business tax rate may encourage charitable giving, but there could be less favourable impacts. While the government pledges to maintain operating spending, [University of Calgary economist Trevor Tombe suggests](#) balancing Alberta's budget by 2022 would require major spending cuts. For civil society organizations, such cuts may lead to loss of contracts and/or grants from the provincial government or having service delivery downloaded on them.



## MINISTRY OF LABOR AND IMMIGRATION

### Labor-related Changes

The UCP Party Platform includes proposed changes that would impact employment standards of civil society organizations (page 21). The UCP government will maintain the 15\$/hour minimum wage, with the exception of the implementation of a youth minimum wage set at 13\$/hour. Other labor-related changes UCP intends to implement include:

- Return to a regular / irregular workday distinction for calculating holiday pay.
- Return to a holiday pay qualifying period of 30 work days in the 12 months preceding a general holiday.
- Reverse the change in 2018 that eliminated the option for workers and employers to develop straight-time banked hours arrangements.

### Immigration

Regarding immigration, the UCP platform focuses on assisting immigrant professionals to upgrade their skills and/or receive accreditation in Canada (pages 41 to 43). The document suggests working with nonprofit organizations to provide financial assistance to low-income newcomers who are seeking professional development, specifically referencing Windmill Microlending (formerly the Alberta Immigrant Access Fund) on page 43.

**Opportunity for NPVS:** Nonprofits could collaborate with the provincial government through developing employment readiness programs for newcomers.

## MINISTRY OF HEALTH<sup>2</sup>

Of the health policy issues highlighted in the UCP platform, the items that are of interest to the NPVS are items regarding mental health and addictions. The key pledges of UCP platform regarding mental health and addictions include (on pages 52 and 53):

- Invest \$100 million over four years to implement a Mental Health and Addiction Strategy based in part on the report of the Alberta Mental Health Review Committee.
- Expand home care to support those who identify addiction and mental health as a primary concern
- Support Albertans in crisis by expanding programs to more communities including police and crisis teams, provincial family violence treatment programs,

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<sup>2</sup> Includes the portfolio of Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.



diversion programs and drug treatment courts, and by developing mental health court models.

The UCP platform pays significant attention to supervised consumption sites on page 54. The government has already initiated a review of the current sites, shelving the creation of new ones until the review is completed. UCP's platform also pledges to "Only endorse new Overdose Prevention Sites if they have clear plans to provide treatment services" and to initiate consultations with residents and business owners. Civil society organizations run three of the six supervised consumption sites currently operating in Alberta.<sup>3</sup>

**Opportunity for NPVS:** Representatives of the sector could participate and inform the proposed consultations regarding the government's strategy on the future of these sites.

## MINISTRY OF ARTS

The UCP platform commits to "Continue funding support for arts and cultural organizations" (page 81). It also proposes to re-profile a portion of Alberta Lottery Fund revenue to support a "Creative Partnerships Alberta" which would work to, among other things, "build partnerships between the arts, philanthropy, and business sector" (page 82).

## MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND PARKS

The UCP platform pledges to "Strengthen partnerships with nonprofit park societies across Alberta, including setting aside \$1 million over four years to pilot an expanded role with park societies," (page 86). This pledge signals an opportunity for park societies across the province to collaborate with the new government.

## MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES

### Human Trafficking, Victim of Crime and Sexual Assault

Fighting against human trafficking and ensuring assistance to victims of crime emerge as the main focus of this ministry's portfolio. The UCP platform pledges to implement an "Alberta Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking" (pages 67-68). The platform also proposes to "Conduct an immediate review of the current model of victim service delivery, victim assistance funding, and victim compensation to ensure there is necessary assistance to victims of crime" (page 64).

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<sup>3</sup> The three organizations that currently run supervised consumption sites are Boyle-McCauley Health Centre, Boyle Street Community Services and George Spady Centre –all based in Edmonton.



The UCP platform promises to commit “\$3.5 million will be new funding directed to sexual assault service centres that provide counseling, support, and advocacy” (page 67), which are services primarily provided by organizations in NPVS.

In addition, the UCP platform pledges that religious and ethno-cultural groups at risk of being victimized by hate-motivated crime will be eligible for matching grants of up to \$100,000 (pages 69-70), which a number of minority cultural and faith-based organizations may find beneficial.

### **Disability Services**

Disability service is an area in which NPVS sector plays an indispensable role. The UCP platform pays special attention to Albertans with disabilities and puts forward a number of policy proposals in this area (pages 75-76). Its proposals include:

- Expanding the “Family Managed Supports” (FMS) model,
- Building on partnerships like Abilities at Work and the Rotary Employment Partnerships by providing \$5 million/year for new partnerships to create job opportunities for persons with disabilities,
- Expanding access for Self-Managed Care and increasing funds available under the Residential Access Modification Program.

### **MINISTRY OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

The UCP platform vows to “restore funding to the Wellness Resiliency and Partnerships Program to support children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder” (page 75), starting at \$1 million/year.

### **MINISTRY OF SENIORS AND HOUSING**

#### **Seniors Care**

The UCP platform focuses on empowering community-based options regarding senior care. It calls for “new long-term care beds to community, non-profit, and independent providers” (page 73). It also pledges to “Allow for the creation of innovative community options (more care at home, and new personal care homes (PCHs) with a maximum of 15 people) for seniors who need more care than can be provided at home alone but who require less care than provided at supportive living facilities” (page 74).

**Opportunity for NPVS:** These proposed policies could be a starting point to develop new partnerships with the government.



### Affordable Housing

The UCP platform also commits to working towards building affordable housing. It proposes to “Expand the use of mixed-income housing that enables people, including seniors, to continue to reside in their communities” (page 79). It also calls for canceling Building Communities of Care grant program in favor of restoring the Alberta Supportive Living Initiative (ASLI) (page 79).