

## COVID-19 Social Impact Report - Spruce Grove

### Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide a social analysis on the impacts of COVID-19 in Spruce Grove. This report is intended to provide information and data to support informed decision-making. Social policy plays a significant role in mitigating or exacerbating impacts in a crisis, such as a global pandemic, and social policies related to COVID-19 will also be highlighted as well.

### Background

While everyone is affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact may be felt by some vulnerable groups in unique ways (Baines, 2011; Bishop, 2015). Specific groups that will be highlighted include:

- Homeless individuals
- Individuals and families experiencing poverty
- Women
- Children
- Seniors
- Immigrants
- Non-profit organizations

Additional analysis will include the effects of COVID-19 on the following social issues:

- Mental health
- Domestic violence and child abuse
- Food access and security
- Social isolation

### Context Prior to COVID-19

#### **Economy and employment**

The unemployment rate in Alberta as of March 6, 2020 was 7.2% when seasonally adjusted (Alberta Government, 2020a). Alberta's unemployment was 2.3% higher than the Canadian national average. Prior to March 9, 2020 there was only one recorded case of COVID-19 in Alberta, this date marked the first jump with 6 new cases in the province (Alberta Government, 2020b). Therefore, this unemployment rate data is prior to the appearance of COVID-19 cases in Alberta and more extreme social distancing measures being established.

## Debt Load

The average consumer debt (not including mortgages) in Alberta in Quarter 4 of 2019 was \$29,076. In addition, the delinquency rate was at 13.3%, second highest in Canada next to B.C (Equifax, 2020, para. 5). In comparison with other provinces, “Albertans are significantly more likely than any other province to be worried that either they or someone in their household could lose their job and say they are not confident in their ability to cope financially with the loss of employment, change in wages or seasonal work without going further into debt” (MNP LTD., 2020, Para 4). As a result of the pandemic 6 out of 10 Albertans indicate they are less than \$200 away from not being able to pay their monthly bills (MNP LTD, 2020).

## Poverty by the Numbers

According to the 2016 Federal Census, 2050 residents in Spruce Grove were in low-income households using the Low Income Measure (LIM) - after tax. In comparison with the total population this equates to 5.7% of residents within Spruce Grove. The 2016 Federal Census also highlights the following data on poverty<sup>1</sup>:

- 12.7% of Canadians are in housing that is unaffordable
- 11.2% of Canadians reported not receiving health care when they felt they needed it
- 8.7% of Canadians were moderately or severely food insecure.

Additionally, an important social indicator to review is income inequality. The Canadian Income Survey, highlights that in Canada the highest income bracket accounts for 23% of the total income in Canada while 40% of the population in the 4 lowest brackets account for 20.8% of total income (Statistics Canada, 2018).

## Rentals and Home Ownership

In Spruce Grove, 23% housing stock are rentals while 77% are home ownership. Looking at the rental numbers, 45.8% of renting households in Spruce Grove experience housing affordability issues. Lone-parent and non-family (individual) households experience even higher rates of housing insecurity (Urban Matters, 2019).

## Homelessness

The most recent Tri-Regional Housing and Needs Estimate identified 210 unique families as ‘at risk of homelessness’. Another 10 individuals were identified as unsheltered (Spruce Grove FCSS & Stony Plain FCSS, n.d).

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<sup>1</sup> The federal Census is completed every 5 years. The next census is scheduled for 2021 with results released in early 2022.

## FCSS Data

In 2019, the FCSS Case Management Program had 328 active participants and conducted 106 intakes of new clients. The top three issues clients had were:

1. Financial
2. Housing
3. Mental Health & Physical Health

These top three issues remained the same in the first quarter of 2020 with the Case Management Program supporting 36 new clients (Spruce Grove FCSS, 2020).

## Context since COVID-19 Pandemic in Alberta

### Alberta Government - Policy Response to COVID-19

March 15, 2020 marked a significant turn for Alberta regarding the spread of the COVID-19 virus. This turning point was due to indicators that demonstrated the virus was no longer contained to travel-related incidents but was being contracted through community transmission. As a result, the Alberta Government mandated more extreme social distancing measures including school and daycare closures, limitations on gatherings over 50 people, and visitation limitations to continuing care and long-term care facilities (Alberta Government, 2020c). As of April 8, 2020 there are 1373 known cases of COVID-19 in Alberta and 26 deaths (Alberta Government, 2020a). However, according to projection reports shared with Albertans by the Alberta Government on April 8, 2020, in a probable scenario the province could see the peak mid-May with approximately 800,000 cases and between 400 - 3100 deaths.

Throughout March increasing closures and limitations were put on several in-person activities and services within Alberta. Additionally, other social policies such as protections for evictions prior to May 1, 2020 and Emergency Isolation Support Funding were put in place. A detailed day-by-day breakdown of changes is available in **Appendix A**. Emergency Isolation Support Closure distributed more than \$91 million to 79,600 eligible Albertans (Alberta Government, 2020b).

### Federal Government - Policy Response to COVID-19

The Federal Government also developed several social policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These policies include development of the COVID-19 economic response plan for Canadians and businesses facing hardship as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Canadian Government introduced several other social policies and supports to help Canadians cope with this crisis including:

- Canada Child Benefit increase of \$300 per child
- Special GST credit payment; \$400 individuals, \$600 couples starting April 9
- Extra time to file income taxes; new deadline June 1, 2020

- Mortgage support; deferral of up to 6 months
- Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB); \$2000/month for up to 4 months for eligible workers. Available from March 15 - Oct. 3, 2020
- EI - waived one week waiting period and waived requirement of medical certificate to access EI sickness benefit.
- Investment of \$100 million to improve access to food for Canadians facing social, economic, and health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Providing an additional \$157.5 million to the Reaching Home initiative.
- \$50 million to women's shelters and sexual assault centres
- \$7.5 million in funding to Kids Help Phone
- Reduced the required minimum withdrawals from Registered Retirement Income Funds (RRIFs) by 25 per cent for 2020.
- Student loan repayments and interest suspended until September 30, 2020.

### **City of Spruce Grove - Policy response to COVID-19**

The City of Spruce Grove has responded to the COVID-19 crisis with several actions that are considered social policy including:

- Spring tax adjustment which brought the tax increase to 0% for 2020
- Utility and tax payment deferral
- Free local and commuter transit
- Cancellation of summer programming and events - including Canada Day, Horizon Stage concerts, and Summer in the City.

### **Economy and Employment**

The unemployment rate in Alberta as of April 9, 2020 was 8.7% (Alberta Government, 2020a). The unemployment rate does not demonstrate the full picture as many are still employed with reduced hours (Government of Canada, 2020a). Many businesses in Alberta are experiencing the combination of downturn in the economy as a result of low oil prices as well as the effects of COVID-19. An estimated 23% of businesses in Edmonton have already ceased or suspended operations during the COVID-19 pandemic (End Poverty Edmonton, 2020). These numbers are anticipated to be similar for Spruce Grove. In Canada, small businesses (1 - 99 employees) make up 70% of private sector employment (Government of Canada, 2019). Many small businesses and nonprofits are not expected to recover after this pandemic (End Poverty Edmonton, 2020; Hudes, 2020). The latest labour force survey showed the largest monthly increase in unemployment since data was available (1976) in March 2020 (Government of Canada, 2020a). Additionally, the labour underutilization rate was 23% which, for comparison, was 12.8% at the peak of the 2008/2009 recession (Government of Canada 2020a).

## Social Impacts on Vulnerable Groups

### Homeless Individuals

Not all individuals have the same access to hygiene or the ability to social distance. Individuals that are experiencing homelessness are not able to wash their hands frequently or social distance if they are experiencing symptoms. Not only are homeless individuals more at-risk of contracting the virus, they are also more at-risk of complications as this population demonstrates higher levels of chronic and concurrent health conditions and lower life expectancy (Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, 2020; Government of Canada, 2020b; Zhang et al., 2018). Homeless individuals also face many barriers to accessing health care such as not having a health care card, an address, or a way to be contacted (Gaetz & Buccieri, n.d.).

The current homeless-serving system in Spruce Grove does not include any sheltered accommodation and relies heavily on Edmonton's homeless-serving services and system. Only a few registered non-profits provide specific support for unsheltered individuals in the Tri-Region. These nonprofits utilize a charity model that provides specific resources such as basic supplies including food and clothing, transportation, and other one-time expenses but they do not move individuals out of homelessness.

Through the COVID-19 crisis, and in the aftermath, there is an anticipated increase in the number of individuals at risk of homelessness due to economic factors such as layoffs. Individuals with unstable employment or inflexible working conditions are identified at greater risk (Government of Canada, 2020c). One recent article identified the types of industries that are most affected by the COVID-19 crisis. The top 5 include:

- Food Service
- Merchandise Stores
- Personal Services (e.g., hair salons, laundromats, massage therapists, etc.)
- Recreation
- Motor Vehicle and Parts Dealers (Berube & Bateman, 2020)

The Alberta Government has currently prohibited evictions until May 1, 2020. However, an increase in the number of homeless individuals can be anticipated without an extension beyond May. While the Canadian Government has put several financial supports in place, approximately 1/3 of unemployed Canadians receive nothing from EI or CERB. Another 14% will receive some support, but less than the \$500 a week (McDonald, 2020).

## Individuals and families experiencing poverty

Another vulnerable demographic includes those that are experiencing poverty. The Champions Table<sup>2</sup> developed the following definition on poverty:

Poverty is multidimensional involving the following factors:

- **Economic Poverty:** People lack access to, or the skills to acquire, sufficient material and financial resources to have quality of life that sustains them.
- **Social Poverty:** People lack formal and informal supports to be resilient in times of crisis and change and the ability to meaningfully participate in the community.
- **Cultural Poverty:** People lack meaning in their lives or connection to a community that sustains them.

While traditional definitions of Poverty focus solely on economic factors, this definition is reflective of other dimensions of poverty which are exacerbated by COVID-19. However, given the significant economic impact of COVID-19 this section will primarily focus on economic poverty. Specific groups show proportionately higher accounts of living in poverty including Indigenous, racial and ethnic minorities, sexual and gender minorities, immigrants, and people with cognitive or physical impairments (Government of Canada, 2019).

People with lower incomes have less resources to prepare and protect against the disease (Government of Canada, 2020b). Further, many low-income jobs are not stable, cannot be done remotely, and often do not have paid sick leave or health benefits (Human Rights Watch, 2020). In short, this means, individuals experiencing poverty are not able to follow the health advice of the Federal and Provincial government and this puts them at higher risk of contracting the virus (Gaetz & Buccieri, n.d.; Vesoulis, 2020). The lack of ability to follow the health advice can disproportionately put low-income individuals are at greater risk of receiving fines for violation as the Government of Alberta ramps up enforcement.

For individuals experiencing poverty, long range planning is extremely difficult because the focus is on immediate needs yet with COVID-19 there is a necessity for longer term planning due to shortages of supplies and accessibility issues (Gaetz & Buccieri, n.d.). This means they may not have reliable access to food, prescription medication, medical and mental health support, etc.; especially if they fall ill and have to self-isolate.

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<sup>2</sup> The Champions Table was convened in October 2019. Comprising inter-sectoral stakeholders from the Tri-region with the goal of working collectively to reduce poverty and homelessness in the Tri-Region.

The Canadian Government notes that anyone with difficulty accessing transportation is more at risk of contracting COVID-19 (Government of Canada, 2020c). Those experiencing poverty are more likely to experience difficulty accessing transportation. Further, individuals experiencing poverty often rely on public transportation to access essential services and supplies (United Way, personal communications, 2019). The City of Spruce Grove temporarily cancelled fare collection on all Spruce Grove local and commuter transit routes (City of Spruce Grove, n.d) which helps individuals experiencing poverty with accessibility and to continue to get to their places of employment.

## **Women**

The COVID-19 pandemic magnifies existing gender inequalities (Lewis, 2020). In 2018, females aged 25 - 54 earned 13.3% less per hour on average than their male counterparts (Statistics Canada, 2019). Another study released in 2019 noted Edmonton had the second highest pay gap in Canada between men and women with average earnings for women at 63.7% of men's incomes (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2019). In March, women ages of 25 to 54 had a monthly decline in employment more than twice that of men (Government of Canada, 2020a). This gender pay gap, combined with the tendency for unpaid caring labour, will impact decisions families make during the pandemic such as deciding on childcare and caregiving responsibilities and fall more to women (Lewis, 2020). The response to COVID-19 also has disproportionately negative impacts 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 (Hawranik, 2020; United Nations Population Fund, 2020).

## **Children**

Children, anyone under the age of 18, are a vulnerable population for a diversity of reasons. They are completely reliant on the adults in their lives to support, care for, and teach them and so as the adults in their lives struggle with noted challenges in this report, so too will their children.

The most significant impact specific to children is the disruption in schooling, daycares, and extra-curricular activities as a result of mitigation measures for COVID-19.

Cauchemez et al. (2009) highlight the high economic and social cost of school closures including:

- Education disparity, with more significant declines in children from low income households.
- Disruption in social programming provided in partnership with schools.
- Young children (under 13) responsible for self-care.
- 93% of low-income households would have serious financial issues with a closure longer than 3 months.

Virtual learning may not be an option for many low-income families because of limited access to internet and technology which would exacerbate educational disparity (Vesoulis, 2020).

## **Seniors**

Individuals over 60 years old are the most likely to experience severe symptoms of COVID-19 (Alberta Government, 2020d). In Spruce Grove, 5,570 residents are over the age of 60 (Statistics Canada, 2016). In addition, to the increased health risks associated with COVID-19, they are also the demographic at greatest risk for social isolation. Social isolation in seniors is caused by physical or life changes (including changes as a result of COVID-19) that limit activities and reduce social contacts. An estimated 30% of Canadian seniors at risk of being socially isolated (MacCourt et al., n.d.) which means in Spruce Grove approximately 1,671 may be dealing with social isolation prior to, and as a result of, COVID-19. Limitations on visitors, cancellation of programming, and access to technology could further exacerbate this issue.

## **Immigrants**

From 2001 - 2016, 1,835 immigrants came to Spruce Grove. The highest numbers of recent immigrants were from Britain, Philippines, India and the United States. The continent of Africa had the lowest number of immigrants with 15 total from 2011 - 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2016).

Individuals that have difficulty reading, speaking, understanding, or communicating are more at risk of contracting COVID-19 (Government of Canada, 2020b). Many newcomers may also struggle to access or understand local systems including reliable and easy to understand information on COVID-19 and how to access the social support available to them. Recent immigrants and individuals in racial or ethnic minorities are also disproportionately living in poverty (Government of Canada, 2019) so the effects of poverty may apply to a portion of the immigrant population as well.

## **Non-profit organizations**

Non-profit organizations are facing issues in business continuity, increased demand for programs and services, and operational costs as a result of COVID-19 (Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (ECVO), March 17, 2020). These organizations could be experiencing staff shortages and breaks in the chain of supply during this pandemic (Gaetz & Buccieri, n.d.)

While the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission (AGLC) have expanded the scope of what nonprofit organizations can use charitable casino funds for, there has been a cancellation of these charitable



casinos indefinitely due to the pandemic (AGLC, March 2020) meaning a loss of essential revenue for some nonprofits.

Spruce Grove is home to a total of 159 registered active nonprofit organizations and charities. There are 16 religious societies, 9 nonprofit private companies, 6 extra provincial nonprofit corporations, 1 agricultural society, and 127 Alberta societies (Alberta Government, 2020e). Many of the organizations listed in the database with a location of Spruce Grove have names that suggest they serve the larger Tri Region, Edmonton and area or all of Alberta. These numbers represent a wide diversity of voluntary organizations including sports and recreation, arts and culture, environment, newcomer settlement, housing, social services, community development, education and research, volunteerism, faith groups, unions, and professional associations, etc (Alberta Government, 2018).

## Social Issues

### Food Access and security

Food security is the ability for individuals and households to access food. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, one in ten households in Alberta experienced food insecurity with household income as the top indicator to predicting household food insecurity (AHS, 2017). The Canadian Community Health Survey (2018) highlights that 12.9% of Albertans were 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 (AHS, 2017). With household income as the number one indicator of household food insecurity, the closure of businesses and layoffs occurring in Alberta increased the number of individuals with inadequate or insecure access.

Food Banks are an essential support for individuals that are needing immediate help and access to food. However, food insecurity will not be addressed by these kinds of food access programs (Tarasuk, St-Germain, & Loopstra, 2019). Additionally, food banks are not often used by all food insecure individuals and tend to support those that are most desperate (Tarasuk, St-Germain & Loopstra, 2019) The Parkland Food Bank is now providing hampers once a month by appointment to limit the spread of the virus and as a result of limited volunteer capacity (Parkland Food Bank, 2020). This means the weekly hamper program is temporarily suspended. The Parkland Food Bank assisted 1614 unique households in 2018 and only 6% of those were long-term clients (Parkland Food Bank, 2018).

## **Mental Health**

One of the known issues that is on the rise as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic is an increase in anxiety, depression, substance misuse, and other mental health disorders. Ng, Agius, and Zaman (2013) found that job-related problems, particularly unemployment, is a key risk factor for mental-health-related difficulties. There is also a correlation between unemployment and suicide rates, with a study from Europe demonstrating a 1% increase in unemployment being associated with a 0.8% rise of suicide in people under 65 years of age (Economou, Nikolaou & Theodossiou, 2008). If the unemployment rate in Alberta jumps to the anticipated 25% (Graney, 2020) this could mean an estimated 14% increase in the suicide rate. Additionally, job insecurity acts as a chronic stressor with cumulative negative effects overtime even for those still employed (Ng, Agius & Zaman, 2013). Therefore, the longer this crisis and the more significant the impact on the economy, correlates to increased mental health issues and the need for additional addiction and mental health support.

Many studies have noted that segregation may cause significant mental health issues e.g., trauma, depression, anxiety, paranoia, and psychosis and intensify pre-existing mental illnesses and demonstrate that a lack of social connection increases health risks as much as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and is twice as harmful to physical and mental health as obesity (Holt-Lunstad, 2015; ). While many discuss the need to stay physically distant while socially connected during the COVID-19 crisis, some vulnerable groups are not able to as a result of 'social poverty' or lack of access to technology.

## **Domestic Violence and Child Abuse**

During the pandemic there are external stressors like financial insecurity and job loss that can lead to an increased risk of domestic violence (Duhatschek, 2020) especially in households with a pre-existing pattern of abuse. Alberta already has the third highest rate of intimate partner violence in Canada (Hawranik, 2020). Social isolation is one of the tactics abusers use as part of the power and control cycle, it can escalate quickly so the victim's only interactions are with their abuser (Murray, 2020). Social distancing and self-isolation measures as a result of COVID-19 may trap victims with their abuser and could make it difficult for a victim to leave an abusive situation if they want to (Duhatschek, 2020; Hawranik, 2020).

As a result of the same stressors highlighted for domestic violence, child abuse is expected to rise during the COVID-19 pandemic. The closure of schools and other children and youth programming has removed early warning systems and caused direct and extended contact with parents facing many significant stressors (Sharp, 2020). This means that while incidents of abuse are expected to rise, reports

of suspected child abuse may decrease because it is teachers, coaches and other community members that often flag initial concerns are no longer in contact with children to the same extent (Sharp, 2020).

This pandemic is creating social conditions that put people at an increased risk of violence. These social conditions are reduced access to resources, increased stress due to job loss or strained finances and disconnection from social support systems (Abramson, 2020).

### **Other Social Issues**

As more people turn to technology to support work commitments, maintain social connections, and complete education the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre is warning individuals to beware of COVID-19 related scams and frauds as to-date there are already ten reported COVID-19 scams (Government of Canada, 2020d).

### **Limitations**

This report aims to provide a summary and analysis of currently known information on the social impacts of COVID-19. However, it is important to note some of the current limitations of this report:

- This issue and the systems that are affected are complex and continually evolving. The total social effects will be discovered overtime.
- There is a lag in or limited data availability. Future analysis and reports will need to be completed once more data is available.
- Local context and analysis can be increased with data sharing across organizations.
- This report highlights specific demographics in relation to their unique impacts as a result of COVID-19. The theory of intersectionality highlights that identity is multi-dimensional and so individuals often intersect more than one facet of marginalization (e.g., low-income senior or immigrant child), which have compounding negative effects and increase vulnerability.

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## Appendix A

### **Summary of changes in Social Policy in Alberta (Alberta Government, 2020c)**

March 15, 2020

- Student attendance at school prohibited
- In person post-secondary classes cancelled
- Licensed child care facilities, out of school care programs and preschool programs closed indefinitely
- Long term care and continuing care facilities limit to essential visitors only
- Mass gatherings restricted to 250 people or less
- Gatherings with more than 50 people with international attendees should be cancelled as well
- Places of worship now included in restrictions of mass gatherings

March 16, 2020

- Provincial Court of Alberta and Court of Queen's Bench limited operations
- Visits to Alberta correctional facilities and young offender centres suspended
- All Alberta parks, recreation facilities, programs, events and bookings are closed to the public and cancelled

March 17, 2020

- Mass gatherings restricted to 50 people or less
- Changes made to Employment Standards Code have been made to provide job protection
  - Full and part-time employees can access 14 days of job-protected leave for the purpose of self-isolation related to COVID-19, retroactive to March 5.
  - Does not apply to self-employed individuals or contractors.
  - Employees self-isolating due to COVID-19 do not require a medical note to access leave.
  - \$60M provided to help social services organizations respond to critical front line services
- Expiry dates for Alberta drivers' licences, vehicle registrations, other permits and certificates extended to May 15, 2020
- The Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee suspended in-person visits with clients or service providers

March 18, 2020

- All non-urgent scheduled and elective surgeries in Alberta are postponed.
- All non-emergency dental treatment and services are suspended. Emergency dental treatment will continue.
- Service Alberta has temporarily closed front counter, in-person access for some services in Edmonton and Calgary. Services remain operational and available, but Albertans should not visit the physical locations.

March 19, 2020

- Emergency Isolation Support Funding
  - A one-time payment of \$1,146 will be distributed to bridge the gap until the federal emergency payments begin in April.
- Implemented a six-month, interest-free moratorium on student loan payments for all individuals who are in the process of repaying these loans.

March 20, 2020

- Stronger restrictions put in place for visitors to long-term and seniors care facilities.
- Drivers road tests suspended until April 20, 2020.
- Deadlines are suspended for businesses, corporations and nonprofits that require holding annual general meetings in order to file their annual returns with Alberta Corporate Registry.

March 21, 2020

- Select licensed child care centres reopening to provide child care for core service workers.
- Alberta Supports is temporarily suspending in-person services effective March 23 until further notice.
- Community and Social Services is working with Alberta Health Services, the City of Edmonton and Homeward Trust to open the Edmonton Expo Centre to homeless people exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19.
- All public fatality inquiries scheduled up to May 22 have been adjourned with no restart date set.

March 22, 2020

- The Alberta Emergency Management Agency Unsolicited Offers Program was set up in response to growing offers of generosity from individuals and organizations to help with the challenges many Albertans are facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Alberta Connects Contact Centre is now available seven days a week, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.
- Testing was prioritized for specific groups that are symptomatic.
- AHS has launched a new text-based service to give Albertans encouragement and ease feelings of stress or anxiety as they respond to recent challenges.
- Small, medium and large private sector employers are able to defer WCB premiums until early 2021 and are eligible for a rebate if already paid.
- Government providing \$25 million to support homeless-serving agencies respond to COVID-19.

March 23, 2020

- Changes to how the charitable gaming proceeds may be used during the pandemic.

March 25, 2020

- Public health orders enforced by law to protect the health and safety of Albertans. Fines for violating an order increased to a prescribed fine of \$1,000 per occurrence.

March 26, 2020

- Alberta Health Services (AHS) has boosted service to help Albertans needing to speak with someone about mental health concerns.

#### March 27, 2020

- Tenants protected from eviction for non-payment before May 1, 2020, rents will not increase during the state of public health emergency and late fees cannot be applied to rent payments for three months.
- Albertans are prohibited from attending gatherings of more than 15 people, and they must continue to observe two metres of social distancing.
- Alberta Health Services (AHS) is postponing some diagnostic imaging procedures as part of the effort to prevent spread of COVID-19 and protect Albertans. Imaging deemed to be non-urgent by the ordering physician will be postponed.

#### April 4, 2020

- Government is deferring timber dues for six months to help ensure forestry companies can continue operations and retain staff during the pandemic. The move uses existing legislation to support Alberta's third-largest industry, which is experiencing low markets for its products as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak

#### April 6, 2020

- Temporary Employment Standard Changes
  - Changes for Employees
    - Employees caring for children affected by school and daycare closures or ill or self-isolated family members due to COVID-19 will have access to unpaid job-protected leave. The 90-day employment requirement is waived and leave length is flexible.
  - Changes for Employees and Employers
    - Increasing the maximum time for a temporary layoff from 60 days to 120 days. This change is retroactive for any temporary layoffs related to COVID-19 that occurred on or after March 17.
  - Changes for Employers
    - Removing the 24-hour written notice requirement for shift changes, and the two weeks' notice for changes to work schedules for those under an averaging agreement.
    - Removing the requirement to provide the group termination notice to employees and unions when 50 or more employees are being terminated.
    - Streamlining the process for approvals related to modifying employment standards so employers and workers can respond quicker to changing conditions at the workplace due to the public health emergency.