



NATIONAL  
POLICE  
FEDERATION

FÉDÉRATION  
DE LA POLICE  
NATIONALE

# 2023 PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

## TO THE GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

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## INTRODUCTION

The National Police Federation (NPF) is the sole certified bargaining agent representing ~20,000 Members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) across Canada, including ~3,500 in Alberta. The NPF is the largest police labour relations organization in Canada and is the first independent national union representing RCMP Members. The NPF is focused on improving public safety in Canada by focusing on increasing resources, equipment, training, and other supports for our Members.

As the Government of Alberta (GoA) has acknowledged, Albertans are facing significant financial pressures. Inflation and the rising cost-of-living will have the per-dollar-value of the GoA's priorities closely scrutinized. The government should not be prioritizing an expensive police transition that will burden Albertans with additional taxes for no proven public safety increases. The government should be focusing its expenditures on initiatives that matter the most to Albertans across the province.

Research conducted by Pollara Strategic Insights in July 2022<sup>i</sup> found that Albertans overwhelmingly support the RCMP:

- 84% want to keep the RCMP with improvements, and only 9% support a proposed transition.
- Albertans indicated their top three priorities are affordability (58%), the economy (49%), and healthcare (48%).
- When considering public safety in rural communities, their top priorities were reducing response times (21%), increasing police resources (20%), and increasing resources to tackle petty crime (15%).

Albertans oppose replacing the RCMP with a provincial police service and are asking for increased RCMP resources to improve public safety.

The GoA's proposal for a police transition includes spending \$371M in one-time transition costs, increasing annual operating costs by \$164M, and an additional \$185M annually in costs to cover the federal contribution loss. These costs over a five to eight-year transition period amounts to over \$2 billion in combined spending. This spending does not prove how a new police service would improve public safety. The Alberta (AB) RCMP and the GoA should continue to work together to enhance and strengthen services to tackle public safety priorities.

Prior to 2017, the GoA invested very little into policing and the RCMP, leading to high crime rates, resourcing challenges, and frustrated communities. Since 2017, the GoA has slowly made strategic investments into policing to address the most vulnerable communities. However, after years of underfunding, additional funds must be invested to meet current and future policing needs in Alberta.

The NPF recommends spending a fraction of the above-mentioned costs over a three-year period to significantly and immediately improve the public safety continuum in Alberta.

## **NPF RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Invest \$371 over three-years to bolster and enhance essential services across the public safety continuum.**

The NPF recommends that the GoA direct the allocated \$371M proposed for one-time transition costs for a new provincial police service to instead, over a three-year period, invest in priorities as set-out by Albertans and communities for immediate benefits and results. Investments should be made as follows:

#### **1. \$164M to increase Regular Member strength by 633 additional positions**

Due to chronic underfunding of the RCMP, hiring of police personnel has not kept pace with population growth or expanding police mandates. The Province has been investing in policing, but police personnel numbers has only increased by about 5.6% between 2017 and 2021, while at the same time, the population in Alberta grew by about 7.3%.<sup>iiii</sup> In 2019, the Province changed the Police Funding Model (PFM) so that communities who used the RCMP but hadn't paid for the service in the past would now be required to pay for a percentage of the costs. With the new PFM changes being implemented over four years, the GoA promised to hire an additional 275 Regular Members (RMs) in rural communities. However, this change isn't enough to tackle the cumulative human resource shortage resulting from years of underfunding to meet current and future policing needs. The government has estimated that the annual population growth rate will be about 1.5% steady until 2046, adding an additional 2.2 million residents.<sup>iv</sup>

The NPF recommends investing \$164M into the hiring of 633 RMs, at a rate of about 211 RMs per year for three-years, including the hiring of 250 administrative support staff. The NPF has been working with the RCMP to improve and streamline the RCMP's recruiting process and the Experienced Police Officer (EPO) program to ensure the demand for recruits and training can be met. We are pleased to announce that we are awaiting the final signatures on changes to the EPO program that will see over 600 EPOs trained across Canada, including about 100 in Alberta.

#### **2. \$45M to support modernized and sustainable equipment resources**

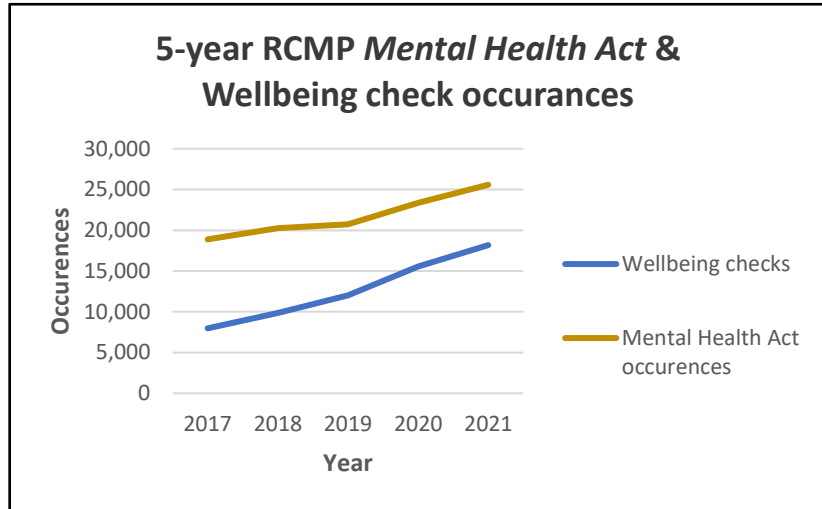
Alberta RCMP Members put their lives on the line every day to protect all Albertans. However, they currently rely on aging equipment to keep themselves safe. To address this aging equipment that becomes faulty through its extended lifespan, the RCMP has made significant investments in equipment modernization, with costs being spread out to contract partners over several years.

The NPF recommends that the GoA invest \$45M to its equipment plan that would include the purchase of replacement pistols; body worn cameras; tasers; hard body armour; vehicle purchase, repairs, and maintenance; radios; aerial surveillance and imaging equipment; and other telecommunications equipment.

### 3. \$20M to address effective and holistic responses to wellbeing and mental health related calls

Albertans have expressed ongoing concerns with the resources made available to vulnerable community members, including those struggling with mental illness and combatting addictions. We know that police services can and should not be the sole bridge between vulnerable Albertans and the complex resources they require. All public services must work together to ensure our most vulnerable have access to the full spectrum of supports and services they need.

Between 2017 and 2021,<sup>v</sup> the number of wellbeing check occurrences that the Alberta RCMP responded to increased by 128%. During that same time, occurrences of calls responding to *Mental Health Act* related occurrences increased by 35%. The Province has made some progress in addressing the expanded scope of policing related to responding to calls where mental health must be considered.



The ongoing underfunding of critical services such as addictions and mental health treatment centres, housing programs, and other community supports for vulnerable Albertans will continue to exacerbate the problem. With nearly 80% of parents of youth aged fifteen and older reporting that their children’s mental health is worse today than two years ago, and 70% of parents of youth between the ages of six and fourteen reporting the same, we can foresee that investment in social services will be crucial to the success of the next generation of Albertans.<sup>vi</sup>

The NPF recommends that the GoA invest \$15M to expand Police and Crisis Response Teams (PACT) across RCMP detachments. The PACT program pairs police officers with a psychiatric nurse or mental health therapist to respond to mental health calls and wellbeing checks together. This joint response effectively addresses the needs of the individual and the community. The expansion of PACT across the province will bring cost savings and modest benefits. The demonstrated improvements resulting from this investment will be deferred hospitalizations, reduced inpatient referrals from jail, and avoiding costs associated with jail time and bookings.

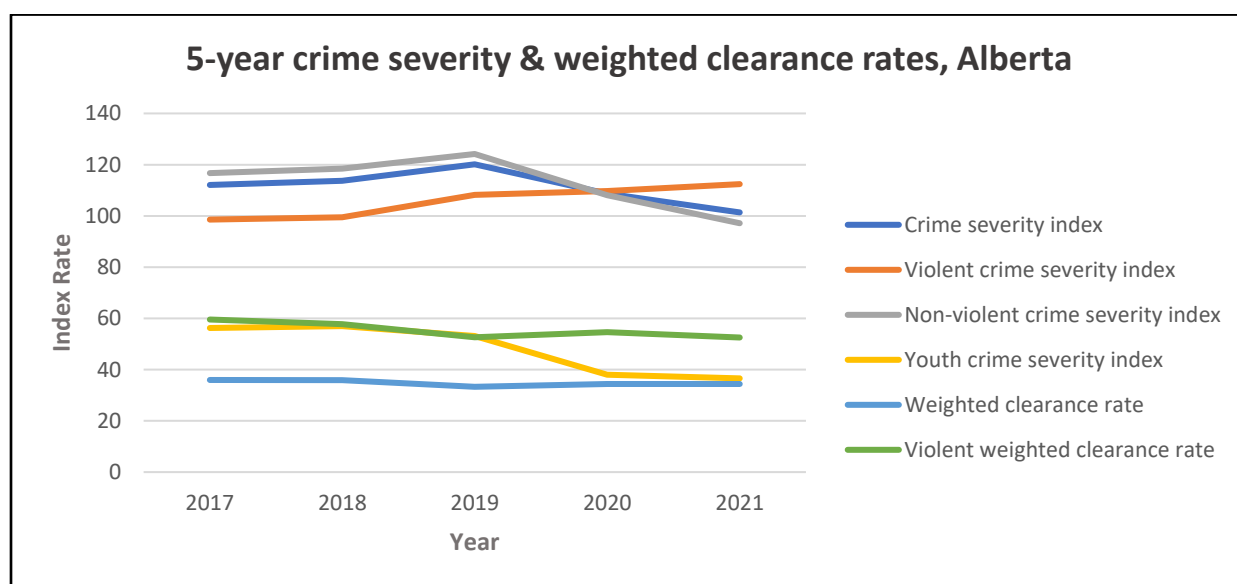
In addition, the GoA should invest \$5M to expand the HealthIM pilot to RCMP detachments across the province. The GoA invested in an initial pilot in 2021 of the HealthIM app. The HealthIM app is a digital risk-assessment tool which helps police screen, de-escalate, and track mental health-related calls. Given the app’s proven track record, other provinces across Canada (Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan) have already adopted the tool. It has shown to contribute to significant reduction in involuntary arrests and police resources, as well as an increase in overall savings: all while ensuring

people in crisis get the appropriate help they need. As just one example, Manitoba recorded a 70 per cent reduction in involuntary arrests between February 2019 and February 2020.<sup>vii</sup>

#### 4. **\$38M invested in proactive initiatives to reduce rural crime across the province**

Our Members are committed to reducing crime in Alberta and have developed and implemented a Crime Reduction Strategy that has seen significant reductions in property crimes in 2021, including: break and enter (down 15%), vehicle theft (down 8%), theft over/under \$5,000 (down 10%) and possession of stolen goods (down 21%).<sup>viii</sup>

Crime reduction success can be seen across Alberta when looking at Statistic Canada’s crime severity index (CSI) and weighted clearance rates between 2017 and 2021.<sup>ix</sup>



As the Government of Alberta has continued to invest in policing throughout successive budgets since 2017, the CSI has dropped 9.5%, primarily due to an almost 17% decrease in the non-violent CSI. Youth crime has also steadily decreased, with an accelerated decrease during the pandemic, though it is expected to increase slightly as we recover from the pandemic and continue to face economic uncertainties. Further improvements are demonstrated by the ability of officers to clear case files through a steady weighted clearance rate, and a significant decrease in the violent clearance rate of almost 12%. This demonstrates that Members are closing more violent crime cases.

However, even with a steady decline in CSIs, violent crime continues to rise across the province. Many rural communities are attributing this to prolific offenders who fall between the cracks of the justice system. The continual increased use of opioids, methamphetamines, other drugs, and firearms that continue to cross the provincial and international borders of Alberta every day, and the associated gang and crime syndicates associated with this illicit trafficking contribute further to these increases. Unfortunately, many rural and vulnerable communities fall prey to these violent crimes, and do not have sufficient resources to fight back.

The NPF recommends that the GoA invest \$38M to bolster the Crime Reduction Strategy, focus on rural and remote communities, and enhance access to services that stop and deter violent crime from taking place through:

- Investing \$10M to enhancing policing services and programs for communities with the highest CSI rates- Wetaskiwin, Cold Lake, Grande Prairie, Red Deer, and Leduc.
- Investing an additional \$5M to the Gun and Gang Violence Action Fund.
- Providing an additional \$2M to the Alberta Community Restorative Justice Program.
- Investing \$3M to expand the Call Back Units to more RCMP detachments across the province.
- Investing an additional \$3M to Project Lock-Up to enhance the response to repeat victims of property crime.
- Investing an addition \$15M to ALERT, specifically to combat opioids, methamphetamines, other drug and human trafficking, child pornography, and gang violence.

**5. \$4M in grant funding to support the implementation of Police Advisory Committees.**

The *Police Act* has been recently amended to include many of the NPF's previous recommendations. We are pleased that greater local governance on community policing priorities will be granted by making the optional Police Advisory Committees mandatory for communities served by the RCMP. To further ease the financial burden and financial hardships faced by municipalities, we recommended that the province provides \$4M toward a one-time grant program. Under this one-time grant, municipalities mandated to create a committee or smaller communities who wish to establish their own can apply to assist in offsetting start-up costs, while allowing additional time for those municipalities to plan for the full associated costs in future budgets.

**6. \$100M should be invested into the public safety continuum with a focus on equitable access in rural and remote communities.**

Over the past decade, RCMP officers are being asked to carry heavy burdens due to dwindling resources and increased demand. Albertans and our Members want more funding for the frontline services that help alleviate pressures on vulnerable Albertans and, by extension, the police. The GoA must do more to ensure that all communities have the front-line public safety and social services needed to help Albertans lead happy, healthy lives.

The remaining \$100M of the \$371M of one-time transition costs should be invested into other avenues of the public safety continuum that are of the highest priority for the reduction of crime across the province. These critical investment areas include:

- Housing
- Social services
- Hospitals and treatment centres
- Diversion programs, specifically in rural areas
- Indigenous communities
- Drug treatment courts



For too long, our Members have been called on to fill gaps between social services. At the same time RCMP detachments are underfunded across the province. Our Members are consistently told to “do more with less,” when they are already overworked, overstressed, and under-rested.

## CONCLUSION

Albertans support their local RCMP and don't want to see their government waste hundreds of millions of dollars on establishing a new provincial police service that will not improve policing in a tangible way or bring immediate improvements. During a time of significant pressures on our economy and all Albertans, increasing taxes to pay for a police transition is not the answer to increased public safety concerns.

There are better and more efficient ways to improve policing and the public safety continuum which will immediately address the real challenges identified by Albertans. The money earmarked for the proposed police transition should be invested as outlined above. These investments can be offset by public safety related revenues and cost saving measures, including:

- Revenues from the Police Funding Model, fines and surcharges related to public safety; and,
- Cost saving measures in relation to the implementation of PACT and investments into addressing prolific offenders, which will result in less police resources needed, booking, jail, court, and administrative costs.

In a time where affordability and prudence are top-of-mind for all Albertans and their families, it is important that Budget 2023 is strategic in effectively addressing the priorities identified by all communities in the province.

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<sup>i</sup> August 2022. National Police Federation – Alberta W4. [Online] Available at: <https://npf-fpn.com/app/uploads/securepdfs/2022/08/NPF-Alberta-W4-July-2022-Final.Aug8-22.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> April 2022. Police Personnel and Expenditures in Canada, 2021. [Online] Available at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2022013-eng.htm>

<sup>iii</sup> December 2020. Police Officers By Level of Policing, By Province and Territory, 2019. [Online] Available at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2020001/article/00015/tbl/tbl04-eng.htm>

<sup>iv</sup> July 2022. Alberta Population Projections 2022-2046. [Online] Available at: <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/45d8dc72-58d7-4b92-b3e6-589cf1869233/resource/c9785433-07f4-4431-be89-7e43696b909f/download/alberta-population-projections-infographic-2022-2046.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> October 2022. RCMP Occurrence Report – 2021. [Online] Available at: <https://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/transparenc/police-info-policieres/calls-appels/occurrence-incident/2021/index-eng.htm>

<sup>vi</sup> June 2022. More Than 70% of Teens Report Worse Mental Health Compared to Before COVID: Survey. [Online] Available at: <https://globalnews.ca/news/8882754/alberta-teens-mental-health-covid-survey/>

<sup>vii</sup> May 2021. Alberta Police Pilot App to Help Assess, De-escalate and Track Mental Health Crisis Calls. [Online] Available at: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-police-app-mental-health-crisis-calls-1.6015660>

<sup>viii</sup> December 2022. Alberta RCMP Data. [Online] Available at: <https://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/ab/criminal-statistics-statistiques-criminelles/alberta-eng.htm>

<sup>ix</sup> August 2022. Crime Severity Index and Weighted Clearance Rates, Police Services in Alberta. [Online] Available at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3510019001&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.1&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=2017&cubeTimeFrame.endYear=2021&referencePeriods=20170101%2C20210101>