

Build a Brighter Future: Opportunity Youth Employment in Alberta

January 2022

Executive Summary

Young people are the future.

Economic and social prosperity in Alberta depends on their successful transition into work. However, the pandemic coupled with a recession has reduced their hope in their future. Their education and training opportunities have been disrupted. Prospects for full-time paid work have declined. This is particularly true for Indigenous youth, immigrant youth, and young women. Opportunity Youth (OY) are among the young people hardest hit by the lack of training, education, and pathways to meaningful employment. Unsurprisingly, young people have reported the greatest declines in mental health of any age group.

Who are Opportunity Youth?

18-29 year olds not engaged in school or work due to structural and social barriers. These include housing or food insecurity, involvement in the justice system, experiencing disability, mental health concerns, caretaking responsibilities, and being a new immigrant or refugee.



It's time to intervene to secure a brighter future for all youth in Alberta.

Recommendations

What can be done to improve the prospects for all youth – and OY in particular – as Alberta enters pandemic recovery and beyond?

A made-in-Alberta solution is required. To identify pathways for action, PolicyWise for Children & Families interviewed key stakeholders in Alberta. We also reviewed practice-based resources and documentation relevant to OY employment. We've based the following recommendations and policy targets on our research findings.

We recommend that Policymakers, employers, funders, and youth serving agencies...



- **Intervene early and prevent disconnection from education, training, and employment:** build bridging supports; provide mentorship; raise young people's aspirations.
- **Tailor supports to unique OY needs:** provide individualized, flexible, long-term support; have active, persistent outreach; design for OY cycling in and out of supports; build employment skills; take a strengths-based, trauma-informed approach.
- **Involve and incentivize employers:** provide incentives and supports; assist employers to hire and retain OY.
- **Improve supporting structures:** enhance system coordination and collaboration; improve data collection and accountability.
- **Involve OY in solution generating activities.**

HIGH YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN ALBERTA

Data tracking on unemployment shows that COVID-19 more strongly impacted the youth population in Alberta. The rate of unemployment for youth (aged 15 to 24) **increased by 11.4%** in Alberta and by 9% nationally between 2019 and 2020.

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH DETERIORATION DUE TO COVID-19

Youth aged 15 to 24 reporting excellent or very good mental health **dropped from 60% (pre-pandemic) to 40%** by July 2020.

The evidence is clear – targeted, cross-sectoral action is required to improve employment conditions for OY.

This will coordinate action toward shared goals. It will also support cross-ministerial collaboration; integrate employment, training, and education; and build the foundation for rigorous data collection. Without strong interventions to stem youth disconnection from school, and address persistent inequities in access to education, housing, food, and other basic needs, OY as a group will continue to grow.

**We suggest
advocacy efforts
and policies target...**



- **The creation and implementation of a provincial youth employment strategy.** Include specific strategies that target youth facing the most barriers to employment, such as OY.
- **More robust, long-term prevention and supports for OY** to address barriers to employment transitions like food and housing insecurity. Identify and address the systemic root causes of economic and employment inequities, such as racism and colonialism.
- **Integrated OY employment and education** into existing provincial policy initiatives, education, and training.
- **Enhanced career awareness and skill development** in high school curriculum.
- **The establishment of a backbone structure** for collaboration and network-building across sectors.
- Existing programs, funding, and **opportunities to target OY.** Examples include: Alberta Jobs Now, Labour Market Partnership, and Alberta 2030 Skills for Jobs.
- **A provincial base for collecting, sharing, and using OY employment data in Alberta.**

We hope the evidence, recommendations, and opportunities outlined in the full report inspire action, spark change, and establish Alberta as a leader in youth futures and OY employment across Canada and beyond.



*Click here for more information
and the full research report.*