

# A CASE FOR A LIVING WAGE

INDIVIDUAL LENS

# INTRODUCTIONS

There are multiple intersecting factors that come together to bring forth a good and sustainable standard of living. Among these include public services such as affordable housing, childcare subsidies, public transportation, and access to education. Additionally, the social and cultural expectations of a given community help define what is considered a good standard of living. With those factors in mind, a more immediate determinant is income. As such, conversations around living wage is crucial when exploring what is considered a meaningful way of living.

## **Considerations**

The information on the info sheet was obtained from literature reviews and community conversations. It is important to note that implementing a living wage will have varying impacts depending on the makeup of the local economy and the target industries. It is important for stakeholders to work together when implementing a living wage so it acknowledges the unique restrictions and opportunities each community and business face.

# KEY POINTS

## **GIVES INDIVIDUALS MORE FREEDOM TO NURTURE THEIR PERSONAL, PROFESSIONAL, AND COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS**

- Increases ability to spend more time and participate in activities with loved ones from not having to balance multiple jobs or extra shifts.
- Gives freedom to support the community by donating to various causes.
- Enhances relationship with employer and fosters loyalty as it signals the value and respect towards employees.

## **CONTRIBUTES TO BETTER MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH**

- Reduces stress by not having to worry about access to basic necessities.
- Improves wellbeing by having the means to afford participation in social activities and recreation.
- Increases access to healthier food options.

# CASE STUDY

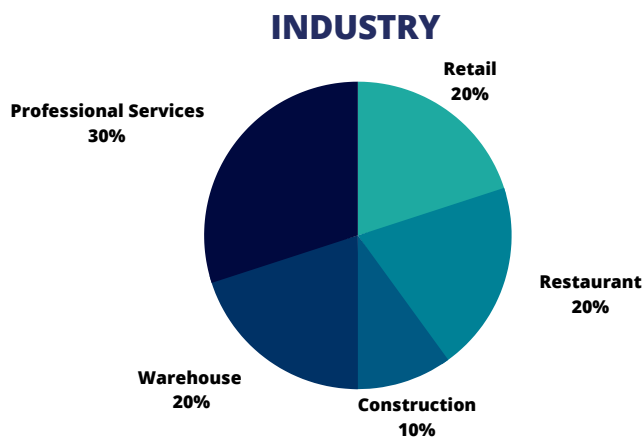
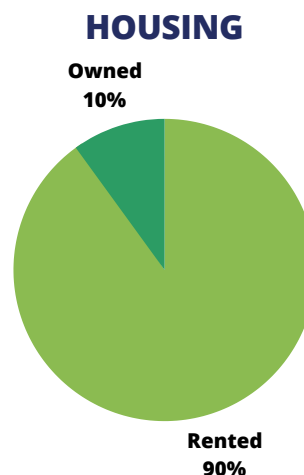
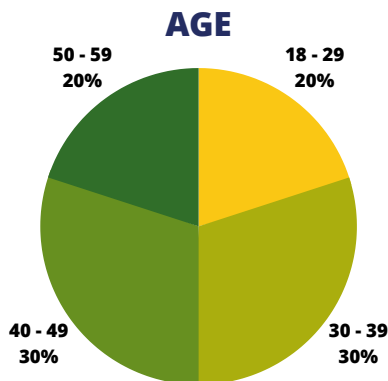
## LIVING WAGE INTERVIEWS

In the fall of 2022, a few member organizations of the Alberta Living Wage Network conducted interviews with individuals who have living or lived experience earning less than a living wage. The purpose of these interviews was for the Alberta Living Wage Network to better understand the perspectives of people who have experience working for wages below the living wage for their community. This will ensure that the assumptions that the Network is making in the living wage methodology actually make sense to folks with lived experience of earning at or below a living wage.

## MEDICINE HAT

Members from Medicine Hat conducted 10 interviews, and the results of those interviews can be found here.

Interviewed participants were currently making or had made \$19/hour.  
Interviewed participants were currently making or had made less than \$19/hour.  
This number was used as an estimate prior to calculating the 2022/23 living wage rate of \$17.50/hour."



# CASE STUDY

## WHAT WOULD YOU CONSIDER ARE YOUR BASIC NEEDS?

All or most participants classified these bills or payments as their basic needs:

- Rent/mortgage payments
- Food
- Utilities
- Phone Bill
- Wifi Bill
- Transportation Costs (bus pass, car insurance, gas)

Other costs listed as basic needs were:

- Prescriptions
- Health costs (dental, medical)
- Clothes for work
- Debt payments (credit card, student, other)
- Pet costs such as vet bills, food and medicine
- Tuition payments

## WHAT HAS YOUR EXPERIENCE BEEN MEETING YOUR BASIC NEEDS WHILE MAKING BELOW A LIVING WAGE?

Most participants have not been able to contribute to an emergency fund or have had to dip into savings to help cover basic needs.

In addition, most participants noted that once all bills were paid they had no or little money to afford

recreation, entertainment or any other extra expenses. Participants with children reported that they often either were not able to afford extra activities for their children or they themselves had to cut costs to be able to purchase new clothes, toys or activities for their children.

A few participants have had to purchase second hand or on sale items, as well as buy flash sale groceries to afford the cost of fresh produce or meat.

"It has been difficult, the biggest part is picking and choosing which I have to pay before they go to collections. For example, my utilities are going to be cut off next month since I cannot make a payment. I had to cancel my phone plan since I cannot pay the bill for it, this has made it difficult for me to have my employer contact me. I cannot even afford basic hygiene products like feminine hygiene products which has been incredibly embarrassing. For the most part I cannot afford to feed myself so I have been eating out of my friends' and family's pantry, I feel so bad for taking from them, everyone is struggling. I have had to sell my personal possessions like my guitar to the pawn shop to afford to live."

**Resident of Medicine Hat**

# CASE STUDY

## WHAT DID YOU WISH YOU COULD AFFORD BUT COULDN'T AT THE TIME OF EARNING BELOW A LIVING WAGE?

Gym memberships to maintain physical health, being able to replace or buy higher quality clothes for work and being able to buy better food were the most common response. These responses show the cyclical nature of poverty,

It is important to highlight that being paid a living wage would help individuals meet their basic needs and end the cyclical nature of poverty.

## WHAT GOVERNMENT BENEFITS ARE YOU CURRENTLY ACCESSING/OR DID ACCESS IN THE PAST? IN WHAT WAYS HAS THIS IMPACTED YOU/HOUSEHOLD?

Participants accessed benefits such as:

- Food Bank
- Employment Insurance during COVID
- Alberta Income Support

However, one participant noted that when they applied and were 2 dollars over the threshold, they were denied. Another was rejected due to being a single individual with no dependants and had to take out a personal loan to cover costs.

"How it stands now, I am poor and will be poor forever, I cannot afford to live, and I cannot afford to go to school to get education to better my life. People see workers like me as lazy and choosing to do minimum wage jobs, but I would do so much more in my life if I could. People think we waste our money, but that is not the case, we are so frugal, we live cheap to just afford the basics, it is so frustrating to be perceived this way."

**Resident of Medicine Hat**

## WHAT DIFFERENCE WOULD A LIVING WAGE MAKE FOR YOU/YOUR FAMILY?

The most common responses were:

- not worrying about if rent would be paid
- not needing to have more than 1 job to get by
- lower stress levels and better mental health
- ability to buy healthier food
- being able to buy clothing and footwear when needed
- buying health and dental insurance
- having a gym membership

As we can see, this list correlates almost exactly to the list of what participants considered basic needs. Being paid a living wage allows for workers to cover basic needs and improve quality of life, leading to healthier individuals and a healthier society.

# REFERENCES

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The Alberta Living Wage Network is made up of community organizations and municipalities with the goal of advancing a coordinated living wage movement in Alberta. The network assists communities in their annual living wage calculation and provides certification to qualifying living wage employers.

**<https://livingwagealberta.ca>**

