



Advocacy

# POSITION Statements

Community Services

*Providing community services such as broadband, policing, education, healthcare, FCSS, and recreation supports community viability and makes rural municipalities attractive places to live and grow. Although providing many of these services in rural areas requires innovative strategies and partnerships, rural municipalities strive to make their communities great places to live and invest.*

**What is the AAMDC's position on the importance of community services in rural municipalities?**

- Community services are proven economic drivers. For Alberta's rural municipalities to offer a quality of life that will attract and retain residents and business development, strong community services must be available.
- Rural municipalities do not have the economies of scale to deliver some community services and often establish innovative collaborative agreements with neighbouring municipalities or local non-profit organizations to ensure their residents' needs are met.
- Community services often look different in rural areas than in urban areas. It is important that rural communities have the autonomy to offer services in a way that meets the local needs of their residents.

**What financial considerations do rural municipalities have with respect to the provision of community services?**

- Due to low population densities, providing some services in rural areas may require innovative solutions including regional service delivery and cost-sharing arrangements with urban neighbours. These arrangements will be determined at the local level through intermunicipal collaboration frameworks (ICFs) and intermunicipal development plans (IDPs), or other means.
- Cost-sharing and other inter-municipal agreements allow municipalities to work together to provide quality community services to their residents at a regional level.
- The local availability of community and health services is strongly linked to rural economic and community development. Funding for services that make municipalities attractive as places to live and work must be prioritized by all levels

of government to promote economic investment in rural areas (ex. small rural schools by necessity, FCSS, policing, broadband).

- The sustainability of rural municipalities relies on attracting a qualified workforce to provide community services. Having programs in place to attract and retain workers contributes to the success and viability of rural Alberta.

### **What collaborative relationships are essential to developing quality rural community services?**

- In some cases, voluntary regional collaboration among multiple municipalities, both rural and urban, facilitate delivery of community services that may be beyond the capacity of individual municipalities. In many cases, this collaboration could be facilitated through the development of intermunicipal collaboration frameworks (ICFs).
- Municipalities work with the provincial and federal governments in addressing service challenges and funding needs. For this collaboration to be effective, provincial and federal community service funding programs must reflect rural municipal priorities as well, and not be catered only to urban communities. priorities and not be distributed only based on population or current number of service users.
- Municipalities also work with other organizations and companies to support rural community development (ex. school boards, library boards, community groups, internet service providers).

### **How does the work of the AAMDC support the sustainability of rural community services?**

- Through advocacy efforts, the AAMDC works to increase awareness and support the sustainability of community services (ex. rural broadband study member survey, input into FCSS Regulation review, input into SuperNet operating agreement).
- The AAMDC champions the rural municipal perspective on community services through regular participation in province-wide committees (ex. Alternative Transportation for Seniors Advisory Committee).

### **What current community service-related issues are impacting rural Alberta?**

#### *Recruitment and Retention*

- The AAMDC supports actions identified in the Government of Alberta's *Rural Economic Development Action Plan* regarding the implementation of programs and policies targeted attracting and retaining people in rural Alberta.

- In many rural municipalities, temporary or seasonal employees in resource industries are common. Rural municipalities would value the opportunity to collaborate with the Government of Alberta in retaining these seasonal employees as permanent community members.

### *Broadband*

- The AAMDC recognizes that Broadband internet access is essential to rural community-building and to attracting qualified professionals and industry to rural areas.
- Many rural residents lack broadband access. It is vital that all levels of government collaborate to recognize the fact that broadband is a basic service for all Canadians, and should be made available across Canada in both urban and rural areas.
- The AAMDC will monitor the Government of Alberta's progress in implementing the broadband-related recommendations in the Rural Economic Development Action Plan.
- The costs for local internet service providers and municipalities to access the Alberta SuperNet should be regulated to ensure that they are affordable. Rather than benefitting specific internet service providers, the SuperNet should support rural connectivity by enabling affordable and high quality broadband access for rural residents, businesses, and municipalities.
- To this point, the Alberta SuperNet has not been an effective tool to support rural final mile broadband access. However, the AAMDC is optimistic that Service Alberta's creation of a new SuperNet operating agreement will lead to the SuperNet realizing its potential to support rural broadband access throughout Alberta.
- Any federal funding program to enhance rural broadband must be structured in a way that ensures funding is available to truly rural areas outside of condensed population centres.
- The AAMDC is pleased with the CRTC's declaration of broadband as a basic telecommunications service, as this reflects the critical role broadband plays in economic development and community growth. Any funding intended to enhance rural broadband that is associated with this designation must prioritize the most underserved areas.

### *Police Funding*

- Community input must be at the heart of a municipality's relationship with local RCMP.

- Many rural municipalities currently contribute to the funding of police administration staff, community peace officers, and, in some cases, police headquarters.
- The AAMDC does not support downloading of additional costs of funding front-line police services onto property tax payers in rural municipalities.
- If increased funding responsibility is downloaded onto rural municipalities, it must be accompanied by improved service and more local input into policing practices.

### *Seniors*

- Aging in place and living independently are important strategies for providing seniors with an opportunity to age with dignity. Funding for home care, assisted living, and accessible transportation for seniors are all key components to supporting rural Alberta's aging population.
- Additional funding is needed to support small seniors' lodges to improve the ability of rural residents to live in supported faculties within their home communities.
- The safety and quality of seniors' lodges are a concern throughout Alberta. Consistent funding for upgrading seniors lodges to meet current building and fire safety codes will benefit rural municipalities by allowing community members to safely remain in their communities.

### *Education*

- Constructive partnerships between municipalities and school boards are essential to selecting and servicing proper school sites and recruiting qualified teachers.
- Rural schools are integral to rural community viability, but many are closing due to low enrollment. This results in increased travel times for students, negates municipal investments into supporting infrastructure, and compromises the retention of rural residents.

### *Libraries*

- In many cases, rural libraries serve as community hubs, particularly for new Albertans. As such, a consistent and long-term approach to library funding that recognizes a continuously growing population is needed in order to sustain rural libraries as hubs of information, distance learning, and community-building.
- The AAMDC is pleased by the Government of Alberta's increased funding support to Alberta's regional library system in the 2017-18 provincial budget. The

AAMDC is hopeful that this increase is the first step in a sustainable funding regime for Alberta's rural libraries.

#### *Family and Community Support Services (FCSS)*

- Social needs vary across the province. FCSS providers need greater autonomy to properly respond to community demand for such services.
- The AAMDC is pleased by the Government of Alberta's increased financial commitment to FCSS services. As a next step, the AAMDC looks forward to working with the Ministry of Human Services and other stakeholders through the FCSS Regulation review to ensure that local FCSS providers are empowered to deliver services as effectively as possible to meet local needs.
- The current economic situation in Alberta is creating increased pressure on social services. Continued support for these programs during this economic downturn is essential.

For more information, visit [www.aamdc.com](http://www.aamdc.com) for **reports** and an online, searchable **Resolution Database** which includes information on all active resolutions and emerging issues related to community services.

AAMDC reports specifically related to the position statements identified in this document include:

- ***Cost Sharing Works: An Examination of Cooperative Inter-municipal Financing***

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