

Enhanced Funding for the Rent Assistance and Temporary Rent Assistance Benefits

Moved by: City of Airdrie

Seconded by: TBD

WHEREAS the Governments of Canada and Alberta proclaimed that every Canadian deserves a safe and affordable place to call home and committed to providing \$444 million in rent support to low-income Albertans in need through the Canada-Alberta Housing Benefit from 2019 to 2028;

WHEREAS the Stronger Foundations Alberta Affordable Housing Strategy identifies the goal to simplify processes and regulations for eligibility, prioritization, and rent setting, creating a more transparent and fair system for Albertans who need housing supports;

WHEREAS a diverse labour force is required to fill a wide-range of jobs to support a vibrant, strong provincial economy;

WHEREAS Albertans across the province are facing increased financial pressures and there are 9.9 per cent (2021 federal Census) or approximately 422,000 Albertans in core housing need; and

WHEREAS the Rent Assistance Benefit (RAB) and the Temporary Rent Assistance Benefit (TRAB) programs are intended to assist lower income Albertan households to afford their rent in housing of their choice;

IT IS THEREFORE RESOLVED THAT Alberta Municipalities advocate for the Government of Alberta to:

- establish predictable, long-term rent assistance funding to meet the needs of all low-income Albertans allowing them to access rent support for appropriate housing;
- increase awareness of rent assistance programs to provide more Albertans in core housing needs with the support that they need to ensure they have access to appropriate housing; and,
- simplify the application process.

BACKGROUND:

Core housing need refers to whether a private household's housing falls below at least one of the indicator thresholds for housing adequacy, affordability or suitability, and would have to spend 30% or more of its total before-tax income to pay the median rent of alternative local housing that is acceptable (attains all three housing indicator thresholds).¹

The Rent Supplement Program provides a subsidy directly to households for an accommodation of their choice to help make rent more affordable. In 2021 the Government of Alberta redesigned the

¹ [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021 – Core housing need \(statcan.gc.ca\)](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/92-62-001-x/2021001/article/00001-eng.htm)

Program and created two benefits, the Rent Assistance Benefit (RAB) and the Temporary Rent Assistance Benefit (TRAB). RAB is a long-term benefit available to subsidize the rent for Albertans if they are below low income thresholds, while TRAB provides a modest subsidy for working households with low income, or those between jobs, and is intended to help eligible tenants afford their rent while they stabilize or improve their situation.²

Presently the Province announces RAB and TRAB funding amounts in the Government's spring budget (prior to end of Q1 annually). The funding cycle for rent assistance program applicants is based on the calendar year, from January to December. This lack of alignment between the funding model and the term of the rent assistance program, means that Administrators must be cautious in accepting additional households in need of support until after the budget is confirmed in the first quarter of the year to avoid oversubscribing the program. In the case that additional program budget is received, Administrators must then onboard new recipients and spend the money prior to the end of the calendar year.

The TRAB was initially launched in seven Alberta urban centres. In August 2022, the temporary assistance program was expanded to include residents from more than 80 communities across the Province. While this was a welcome announcement, no additional funding was dedicated to the expanded program.

Albertans are struggling to afford housing at alarming rates. An expansion of funding to rent assistance programs would help meet some of the increased need. The Province's *Alberta is Calling* campaign actively encourages people to relocate to Alberta to build their futures. The resulting high in-migration of people is a driver behind the low vacancy rates across the province, causing rents to spike to unprecedented levels impacting those who can afford it least.

Many lower income Albertans are not aware of either the RAB or TRAB. If people are not connected to government or not-for-profit supports, they may simply not know about the program and applying on-line can also be confusing. One of the main challenges applicants face is that to qualify they must already be living in a rental unit or have a signed lease prior to receipt of their first subsidy payment. Many individuals and families need to secure the rent assistance benefit prior to obtaining housing to be able to afford it.

In addition, the TRAB income level is quite low and Albertans who know about the program are finding it difficult to qualify for the temporary assistance. More funding targeted at those Albertans most in need, enhanced public education about the existence of rent assistance programs and a simplified application process would go a long way to addressing core housing need in Alberta.

Access to stable, adequate housing is foundational to community wellbeing and prosperity of all Albertans. Adequately funding the rent supplement program has a direct impact on building thriving, safe and welcoming communities for all.

2 Stronger Foundations: Alberta's 10-year strategy to improve and expand affordable housing, pg. 8.

ALBERTA MUNICIPALITIES COMMENTS: