



COALITION OF **ALBERTA** PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Pre-Budget Submission 2026

Government of Alberta

Libraries are Essential Services for All Albertans

Public libraries are essential community infrastructure that serves virtually every Albertan, and generate outsized returns on investment in the communities in which they operate. Alberta's libraries have evolved well-beyond repositories of books and archives into crucial community hubs that drive economic development, foster literacy and learning across all ages, bridge the digital divide, and provide frontline social supports. Libraries "quietly fulfill core mandates of every order of government," according to the Canadian Urban Institute and Canadian Urban Libraries Council by providing access to knowledge, culture, health information, digital connectivity and safe space.

However, as Alberta's libraries have grown and changed alongside our rapidly growing province, provincial funding for our institutions has not kept pace. Libraries are being stretched to the brink and now struggle to meet the ever-increasing demands of the communities we serve.

→ **324**
service points across Alberta

→ **99%**
of Albertans have access to a public library

A Wide Range of Services

Alberta's libraries provide a comprehensive array of services that support education, employment, digital access, and social connection.

Learning & Literacy services help to support and augment the services provided by the province's K-12 education system and other supports:

- Early childhood literacy programs and preschool services that build foundational reading skills
- Homework support and academic resources for school-aged children and teenagers
- Lifelong learning opportunities for adults pursuing new skills and knowledge
- Access to digital learning platforms and online educational resources

→ **1 in 5**
adult Albertans face daily literacy and numeracy challenges

Employment & Economic Opportunity services that help to grow the economy and help Albertans find meaningful employment opportunities:

- Job search assistance and resume preparation support
- Digital skills training and workforce development programming
- Interview preparation and career counseling services
- Access to professional development resources

→ **\$187 million**
Annual economic impact of public libraries in **Edmonton alone**.

Digital Access & Connectivity services that bridge the digital divide:

- Free internet and computer access for communities where home connectivity is unavailable or unaffordable
- Technology support and digital literacy instruction, and device lending programs
- Online service connections for rural Albertans accessing provincial and federal programs

→ **489,000**
Albertans lack access to high-speed internet in their homes in 2021 (Government of Alberta)

CONTEXT

Community Connection & Wellness services provided by Alberta's libraries help to make life better for Albertans, and reduce downstream stresses on health and social services:

- Safe, welcoming spaces for community gathering and social connection
- Programming for vulnerable populations including seniors, families, and isolated individuals
- Access to mental health resources and wellness information
- Support services that break down barriers to community participation

Collections & Information Access services help to save Albertans money, and enrich their lives with diverse perspectives:

- Curated print and digital collections serving diverse interests and age groups, managed to ensure that materials are developmentally appropriate for the audiences who access them
- Specialized materials for patrons with different learning needs
- Free and low-barrier access to media, music, and entertainment resources
- Reference services and research support

Scale of Impact

From small, rural communities to big city centres, public libraries continue deliver big impact for all Albertans. Below are just a few of the transformational services libraries provide and their impact.

Metric	Value
Albertans with access to a public library	4,266,204 (99.8% of the population)
Registered library cardholders	1,351,621 (31% of population)
Annual in-person visits	~13 million visits
Annual virtual visits (website/app)	~25 million visits
Total items available province-wide	35+ million (books, eBooks, DVDs, etc.)
Annual items borrowed (circulation)	37 million (~8 items per Albertan)
Programs offered	~84,000 programs/year (all ages)
Program attendance	~1.6 million participants/year
Estimated cost per Albertan per year	~\$50 (75% municipal revenues)

What We're Asking For: Urgent Investment in Library Funding

Alberta's library funding model has not kept pace with dramatic population growth and economic challenges. Despite serving more Albertans than ever, library funding from the Province has stalled while operational demands have accelerated.

We are asking the Government of Alberta to:

- increase the per-capita Library Services grant from \$5.60 to \$6.94
- increase the per-capita Operating Grant for regional systems from \$4.75 to \$5.90
- allocate funding based on current population data, and to update those figures annually
- index per-capita grants to inflation going forward

The timing for this investment is critical. Without updated funding, libraries face the difficult choice of reducing hours, cutting programs, eliminating collections, increasing costs for Albertans, or reducing technology access—precisely when Albertans need these services most.



45%

of working age Albertans do not have the literacy skills to perform most jobs



67%

of rural Albertans do not have access to reliable high-speed WiFi (Alberta Broadband Strategy)

Why This Investment Matters Now

Provincial investment in libraries is felt across all regions, all backgrounds, and most government priorities. Below are the key areas of return on this investment:

Addressing Affordability and Quality of Life

In a context of fiscal pressures and concerns about cost of living, libraries provide Albertans with free access to tools, resources, and programming that would otherwise be expensive or unavailable:

- Free internet and computer access eliminate barriers to employment and service access
- Free programming and collections reduce household expenses for education and entertainment
- Digital skills training and job search support help Albertans achieve economic stability

Supporting Economic Development

Investing in libraries creates the conditions for a stronger, more skilled Alberta workforce. Library investments directly support workforce development by providing:

- Early childhood literacy that builds readiness for school and long-term success
- Digital skills training and job search support for jobseekers
- Free access to professional development resources

Maintaining Rural Vitality

Rural communities depend on libraries as critical access points. Adequate funding ensures these vital connection points remain operational and accessible. Libraries connect rural Albertans to:

- Government services they might otherwise struggle to access
- Online resources and digital connectivity
- Community programs that build social cohesion

Summary of Impacts & Benefits



Learning & Workforce

Enhanced literacy outcomes, faster employment, stronger workforce skills.



Economic Opportunity

Increased employment rates, reduced household costs, business support, tax relief.



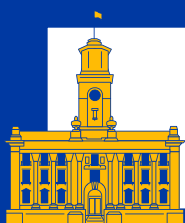
Community Wellbeing

Reduced social isolation, support for families, seniors, newcomers, and vulnerable populations, improved public health outcomes.



Rural Vitality

Enhanced service access, community connection, economic opportunity.



Municipal Sustainability

Reduced property tax pressure, sustainable local infrastructure.

Economic Impacts & Benefits

These impacts extend across all Alberta communities—urban centres and rural regions, wealthy neighbourhoods and vulnerable populations—making libraries a fundamentally equitable public investment. Libraries generate returns far exceeding the provincial investment through improved educational outcomes, faster workforce attachment, reduced household costs, stronger communities, and sustained economic opportunity. This is cost-effective public infrastructure delivering measurable, community-wide benefits.

“The persistently high percentage of the working-age population with poor and weak literacy scores is particularly worrisome, as literacy is required for economic growth.”

The Case for Literacy in Alberta by the Canada West Foundation

Economic Impact

Public libraries deliver strong economic value for every dollar invested. A meta-analysis of dozens of library return on investment (ROI) studies across North America conducted by the Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC) in partnership with the Canadian Urban Institute found that on average public libraries return \$4–\$5 in value for every \$1 spent. Studies in Alberta echo this ROI: according to a rigorous third-party study, Edmonton Public Library has an estimated return of \$3.11 for every dollar invested and creates an annual economic impact of \$187 million. Some of the ways in which libraries deliver direct economic outcomes include:

- Support for jobseekers who access resume support, interview preparation, and digital skills training secure employment more quickly. Faster employment means faster tax contributions and reduced demand on social services.
- Access to professional development and online business resources supports entrepreneurship.
- Further, communities with strong library services show higher workforce participation and economic vitality.

Cost Savings for Albertans

Libraries reduce household costs and improve quality of life, saving residents approximately \$212 per year by providing low or no cost access to resources, according to a third-party study. We do this by offering:

- Free internet and computer access reduces the need for home subscriptions or internet cafe use among low-income Albertans.
- Free access to educational resources, media, and programming reduces household spending
- Free community programming provides wellness and social engagement opportunities that might otherwise require paid services
- Digital access to government services reduces travel costs and time for rural Albertans

Community Property Tax Relief

Provincial investment in library funding reduces pressure on municipal property taxes:

- As municipalities currently shoulder 75% of library costs, increased provincial support directly reduces municipal funding gaps
- This helps contain municipal property tax increases and improves housing affordability
- Sustainable provincial funding allows municipalities to invest in other local priorities

Social & Community Impacts & Benefits

Alberta's public libraries also provide significant preventative economic value. By promoting literacy, education, and social inclusion, libraries help reduce downstream costs in areas like justice, healthcare, and social services. Some ways in which Alberta's libraries make life better in the province and help to decrease other social costs include:

- For families with young children, libraries create safe gathering spaces and peer support opportunities
- For seniors, libraries provide social connection, programming, and access to technology
- For newcomers, libraries are often the "first stop" for individuals and families looking for community, gain language skills, and learn more about their new home

Supporting Vulnerable Populations

Libraries' role in serving vulnerable populations delivers measurable community benefits, while decreasing strain on provincially funded health and social services:

- Unhoused and underhoused individuals access facilities, services, and support connections
- Low-income families access free resources that support children and reduce financial stress
- Rural populations access services that might otherwise require expensive travel

Municipalities Support Greater Funding for Public Libraries

At the fall 2025 conventions for rural and urban municipalities in the province, Alberta's locally elected officials voted overwhelmingly in favour of urging the provincial government to increase financial support for libraries in the province. Both Alberta Municipalities, the organization representing villages, towns, and cities in the province, as well as Rural Municipalities of Alberta which represents the province's counties and municipal districts, advocated for the increase to per-capita municipal library grants we have suggested above - and further asked for current populations to be used in calculating grants provided.

In these resolutions, Alberta's municipal leaders validated the important role that libraries play in making life better for Albertans, as well as the ways that they support stronger and more complete communities in the province. In particular, mayors, reeves, and councillors expressed the importance of libraries in providing community hubs for programming and resources, their roles in bridging the gap between urban and rural internet services, as well as our important services provided to families, newcomers, job-seekers and those looking to learn and improve their skills.