



BUSINESS COUNCIL  
OF ALBERTA

# Clearing a Path

## Helping Displaced Albertans Re-enter the Workforce



Final Report from the Task Force on Long-Term  
Unemployment & Workforce Transition  
Summary of Recommendations

February 2022

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## **Land Acknowledgement**

In the spirit of truth, reconciliation, and respect, we honour and acknowledge the lands upon which we live and work as guests, including the traditional territories of the First Nations in Treaties 6, 7, and 8 and the citizens of the Metis Nation of Alberta. We thank the First Peoples of this land, which we now call Alberta, for their generations of stewardship of the land, and we seek to walk together in the spirit of truth and reconciliation to build a shared future for all in Alberta.

## **About the Business Council of Alberta**

The Business Council of Alberta is a non-partisan, for-purpose organization dedicated to building a better Alberta within a more dynamic Canada. Composed of the chief executives and leading entrepreneurs of the province's largest enterprises, Council members are proud to represent the majority of Alberta's private sector investment, job creation, exports, and research and development. The Council is committed to working with leaders and stakeholders across Alberta and Canada in proposing bold and innovative public policy solutions and initiatives that will make life better for Albertans.

*This document reflects the views of the Business Council of Alberta based on our own research and on engagement with members and stakeholders. Alberta is a diverse place. In many cases, there are a range of views on an issue within the Council membership. This piece may not necessarily reflect the perspective of all BCA member companies, and should not be read as the position of any one member.*

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# Summary of Recommendations



## Building a strong foundation

### Supporting mental health and addiction

» **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Non-Group Coverage program administered by Alberta Blue Cross cover at least 75 percent of the cost of a counselling session and that the overall subsidized cost for the Non-Group Coverage program is reduced by lowering the premiums and increasing the qualifying annual income cap to under \$40,000, thereby making the program accessible to more people.

### Developing a national competency framework

» **RECOMMENDATION:** That, following a recommendation made by the Canada West Foundation, the Government of Canada assemble a committee of interested stakeholders (including employers, labour, government, and education providers) to decide on a pilot sector in which to start building a pan-Canadian competency framework and provide initial direction. A working group would then determine the details of the framework (including number of levels and common vocabulary) using the frameworks of other countries as a guide.

### Identifying skills shortages and labour market gaps

» **RECOMMENDATION:** That businesses or business representative organizations work together to identify and catalogue the skills and competencies required in the workplace and initiate an ongoing and formal relationship with post-secondary institutions to communicate those skills and competencies to inform the development of a job-focused curriculum. Necessary steps include:

- Organizing a cross-sectoral working group of businesses that meet regularly (e.g., semi-annually) and agree on a list of current in-demand skills and competencies, future in-demand skills and competencies, and skills missing from the workforce;
- Creating a strategy to engage with post-secondary institutions on a regular basis; and
- Developing a framework to measure how responsive post-secondary institutions are to labour market needs—this level of responsiveness should increase over time.

» **RECOMMENDATION:** That post-secondary institutions coordinate with government and the business community to adapt programs to emphasize skills development. This could include:

- Focusing learning outcomes on demonstrating mastery of skills rather than uptake of discipline-specific content;
- Providing opportunities to apply learnings through career-focused experiential learning methods; and
- Communicating graduates' skills attainment on official credentials (e.g., course transcripts), thereby helping employers understand the skills graduates have mastered.

» **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Government of Canada, through Statistics Canada, collect more detailed labour market information data and make it accessible to businesses and job-seekers—in particular, data on the skills and competencies required by a job.



## Improving government training support programs

### Developing a cohesive workforce development strategy

» **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Department of Jobs, Economy and Innovation serve as the central ministry that guides the Government of Alberta's workforce development strategy and coordinate the allocation of funds to Advanced Education, Labour and Immigration, and Community and Social Services for their respective workforce development programs.

### Consolidating and simplifying existing programs

» **RECOMMENDATION:** That the governments of Canada and Alberta consolidate and streamline their existing training supports into a smaller number of well-funded, broad-based programs. Overall spending levels should, at minimum, be maintained.

### Creating a one-stop window

» **RECOMMENDATION:** That the governments of Alberta and Canada fund a single, clear, accessible one-stop window, administered by a non-profit organization, to help individuals, businesses, and community organizations access government and third-party supports for upskilling and training programs. Necessary steps include:

- Testing the design with businesses and individuals to make sure it is easy to navigate;
- Employing customer-service oriented individuals to field inquiries, identify specific program(s) that best fit the client's need, and assist with filling out applications;
- Ensuring a rapid response and turnaround time, whereby inquirers can expect to complete their applications within a few days;
- Establishing an open line of communication between the non-profit and relevant government ministries to ensure the non-profit has sufficient knowledge of existing programs; and
- Promoting the one-stop window so it is widely recognized as a portal to the myriad available training programs.

### Reforming the Canada-Alberta Job Grant

» **RECOMMENDATION:** That the federal government increase its annual contribution to the Workforce Development Agreement by \$30 million. The Alberta government should earmark half that amount specifically towards efforts to support training for unemployed Albertans under the Canada-Alberta Job Grant (CAJG). These additional funds can be used to either increase the \$300,000 grant contribution cap on employers or to expand the number of companies the program is able to support.

» **RECOMMENDATION:** That, to improve access to employer-driven training for unemployed Albertans, the Government of Alberta remove existing conditions that require businesses to hire, or to have extended a job offer to, an individual before they can qualify for training support under the CAJG



» **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Government of Alberta allocate the other \$15 million of new CAJG funding to expand the program so that employees facing termination are eligible for 100 percent government-funded training support in the same way as individuals who are unemployed. As above, these additional funds could be used either to increase the per-employer grant cap, or to increase the number of companies the program is able to support. If an employer later chooses to retain or re-hire that person, they would be required to reimburse the government for their share of those training costs.

## Reforming the Alberta Jobs Now Program

» **RECOMMENDATION:** That access to the Alberta Jobs Now program be limited to employers who hire unemployed Albertans.

» **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Alberta Jobs Now program expand incentives to hire people from groups with higher levels of unemployment, including women, recent immigrants, youth, recent graduates, visible minorities, and Indigenous People. As with the targeted incentive for persons with disabilities, the program should allow employers to receive a deeper subsidy (37.5 percent of a new hire's salary) when hiring from these cohorts.

» **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Alberta Jobs Now program transition to purely a wage-subsidy program. The program should be extended and made permanent to provide long-term support to help the long-term unemployed gain jobs.

## Measuring Success

» **RECOMMENDATION:** That the federal and provincial governments develop and make available outcomes-based evaluation and performance measures for government-funded training programs. Programs should be evaluated based on their effectiveness at helping individuals find well-paying work. Programs should be revisited and reviewed based on past successes and failures, as well as international best practices.



## Creating incentives through Employment Insurance Reform

» **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Government of Canada reform the Employment Insurance (EI) program, shifting its focus towards supporting individuals who use their period of unemployment to upgrade their skills. Options include:

- Requiring individuals to participate in employment and career management services programs as a condition for receiving EI payments;
- Allowing individuals to complete a training program before accepting a new job if the skills being acquired are relevant in a high-demand field; and
- Increasing the duration and level of EI benefits (currently about \$638 per week) for individuals who pursue training programs while unemployed.

» **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Government of Canada begin making a direct financial contribution to the EI program, with the additional funds over and above existing employer/employee contributions being used to support individuals who undertake self-directed training and skills upgrading during the tenure of their unemployment.



## Building effective just transition programs

» **RECOMMENDATION:** That when developing future just transition legislation and support programs, the federal government incorporate the following considerations:

- The business community must play a central role in informing just transition policies;
- Just transition resources should be focused on the regions and communities directly impacted by job losses and closures;
- Just transition supports should reflect workers' preferences, skills, and age;
- Historically disadvantaged groups need to be considered in just transition policy design;
- A just transition should take place in the context of a vibrant and growing Canadian energy sector;
- Better information is needed about labour market development and skills demand; and
- Transition programs should incorporate clear, outcomes-based success metrics.



## Encouraging private sector solutions

» **RECOMMENDATION:** That Alberta employers consider the business and societal benefits that can be accrued by proactively cultivating an agile, skilled, resilient, and future-focused workforce. Best practices to help build this type of workforce include:

- Improving coordination across industries and occupations to communicate current and anticipated skills needs with governments and post-secondary institutions;
- Investing more in training and upskilling of existing staff;
- Improving recognition of how intergenerational skillsets can be complementary;
- Creating a more inclusive and welcoming workplace culture;
- Studying and adopting best practices for workforce transition programs;
- Studying and adopting best practices for employee orientation/rotation programs; and
- Revisiting the effectiveness of current hiring practices.



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