

Establishing Community Safety and Wellbeing Strategies in Alberta's Municipalities

Issue

Albertans are concerned with rising crime levels and safety issues within their local communities, and areas outside of Edmonton and Calgary feel left out of government supports. Ensuring the safety and well-being of its citizens is a fundamental responsibility of any government, and it is important to find equitable, effective, and collaborative solutions that consider various regional differences and needs.

Background

Recently, the province of Ontario set out to deal with municipal safety concerns by legislating that Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) plans be created by every municipality in the province through the 2019 Comprehensive Police Services Act (Bill 68). According to the Government of Ontario website, “the goal of this provincial mandate is to establish a proactive and collaborative approach to community safety and wellbeing planning, in which the municipalities will take the lead in identifying and responding to local needs alongside other community service providers.” In Alberta, municipalities including Strathcona County, Lethbridge, Morinville, Edmonton, and others have also undertaken CSWB work to date.

The Canadian Municipal Network on Crime Prevention (CMNCP) released a “Practitioner Guide on Crime prevention and Community Safety & Well-Being Planning” that reviewed Community Safety & Well-Being Plans (CP/CSWB) that have been undertaken in various municipalities across Canada and published best practices from the review. There are some important learnings from this document that can be used.

First, collaboration from various community stakeholders is an important foundation. CMNCP document notes that, “ideally, a CP/CSWB plan requires community collaboration at all stages. Input and feedback from local stakeholders, residents, people with lived and living experience, as well as others within the community is vital to effectively identifying and addressing priority areas.”

Next, a holistic approach should be taken when collecting community data. The CMNCP document notes that, “measuring crime rates exclusively does not offer a full picture of well-being and as a result, other aspects such as community connectedness and civic engagement should be evaluated to determine the impact of a CP/CSWB plan.” A strong CSWB assessment would encompass a range of factors such as crime rates, social determinants of health/justice, economic disparities, and community dynamics. With a broader set of information, targeted interventions can be developed, addressing the root causes of safety risks, and enhancing overall well-being. It is also important to have a strong research foundation for a successful CSWB plan. By having municipalities answer the same set of baseline questions, the Government of Alberta can get an aggregated view of municipal performance and needs and respond accordingly.

Finally, recognizing regional differences is crucial when developing effective strategies to enhance community safety and well-being. By conducting CSWB assessments, municipalities can gather data and insights that inform the development of tailored interventions. This data-driven approach helps policymakers identify priority areas, allocate resources effectively, and evaluate the impact of interventions over time.

By having municipalities work with their local stakeholders, and in turn with the province, Alberta can facilitate a comprehensive understanding of local challenges, develop tailored plans to improve municipal safety. Through these initiatives, Alberta can create a province where every community thrives, and its residents enjoy enhanced safety, well-being, and quality of life.

The Alberta Chambers of Commerce recommends that the Government of Alberta work with relevant stakeholders to:

1. Encourage municipalities to conduct Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) assessments to create strategies that promote safer communities;
2. Recognize regional differences, and ensure funding provisions are equitable and fair across the province;
3. Provide supports to municipalities that will allow them to gain the expertise, training, and support throughout communities of practice through Canadian Municipal Network on Crime Prevention and the local police service, and;
4. Provide base funding to support the timely completion, submission and implementation of Community Safety and Well-Being strategies by municipalities.