

# More than Nickels and Dimes Albertans pay highest out-of-pocket costs for services



Alberta families watch a large bite of their take-home pay get eaten up by fees for critical public services. That bite will get bigger with the looming budget cuts.

Statistics Canada's Survey of Household Spending shows that Alberta's families already pay the highest out of pocket costs in the country for health care and are in the top for fees for utilities, education and child care. (Figures 3 and 4).

Services like health care, child care, education and utilities have been affected by deregulation, privatization, and under-funding. Albertans pay for these services either way – through their tax dollars or out of their own pockets. Budget cuts to those services will increase the cost burden for families in Alberta.

## Albertans pay most out-of-pocket for health care

Albertans have the highest out of pocket spending on health care in the nation. As shown in Figure 1, Alberta families pay 13% more than families in other provinces for out-of-pocket health care costs. Even accounting for the elimination of health care premiums, Albertans still pay the highest out-of-pocket costs for health care.

Within health care spending, dental and eye care stand out as big ticket items for average Alberta families. Eye exams for adults were de-listed in the mid 1990s and dental care has never been included in Alberta's public health care plan.

Another area where Albertans paid significantly more was for 'other medical services' which includes nursing homes and ambulances. This coincides with a campaign to downgrade long term care homes to assisted living homes, un-bundling services and transferring costs onto seniors and their families.

Alberta's ambulance charges are among the highest in Canada. Those fees vary by municipality in Alberta. Edmonton charged \$344 for an ambulance in 2007. In other words, a family with a child experiencing an asthma breathing crisis would pay \$344 or more for an ambulance. By contrast, the same ambulance would cost a BC family \$80.

FIGURE 1

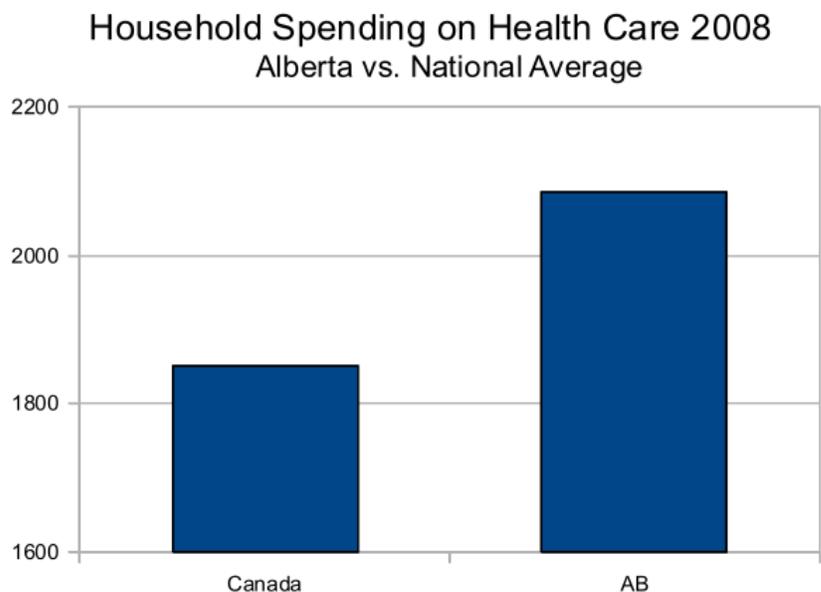


FIGURE 3

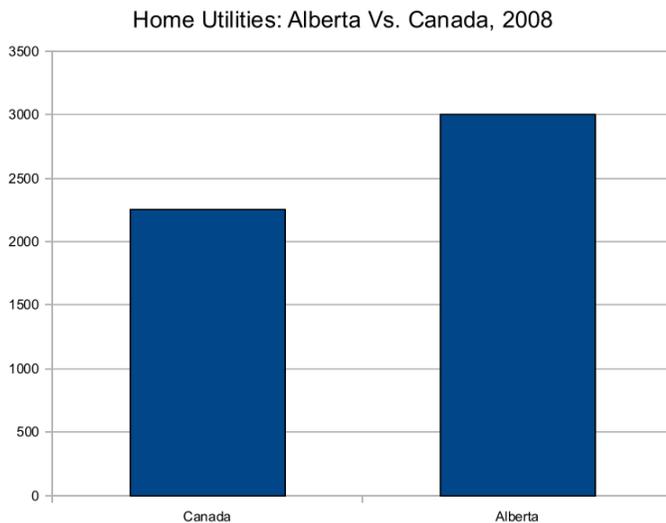
### Utilities

Alberta’s utilities have been under-funded, deregulated and privatized to a great extent by the province and across municipalities. Not coincidentally, Albertans spent the highest fees in the nation for combined water, sewage, heat, and electricity. Alberta’s water and sewage rates are the highest rates in the nation and more than double the Canadian average. Fees for electricity are amongst the highest and much more than the Canadian average. (Figure 2)

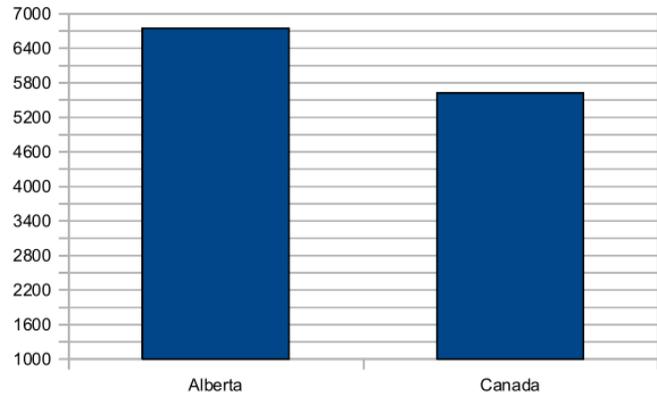
### Child Care

Alberta households are in the top three in Canada for out-of-pocket spending on child care, despite having Canada’s lowest workforce participation rates for women with children under five. Alberta families pay some of the highest child care fees in Canada for a system that has amongst the fewest number of regulated spaces.

FIGURE 2



2008 Household Spending: Alberta Vs. Canada  
Child Care, Health Care, Education & Home Utilities



### Education

Alberta families spend more than the Canadian average on textbooks, supplies, and other supplementary items for K-12 education as well as tuition fees for all levels of education.

### Conclusion

Figures 3 and 4 show the extent to which Alberta families are already paying more out of pocket than other families in the nation. Before going any further down the path to budget cuts or privatization, the Alberta government should undertake a thorough study of the impacts these policy directions have on Alberta’s families and their disposable incomes.

Source: Statistics Canada Survey of Household Spending, 2008. CANSIM: Tables 203-0001 to 203-0020. Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 3508. Detailed Average Household Expenditure for Canada, Provinces/ Territories and Selected Metropolitan Areas, 2008 (62F0031X).

FIGURE 4

2008 Household Spending	Canada	AB	NL	PEI	NS	NB	QC	ON	MB	SK	BC	Alberta - % Above Cnd Average
Child Care	342	<b>397</b>	252	523	272	327	277	435	183	263	253	16.00%
Health Care	1850	<b>2086</b>	1541	1969	1688	1980	1860	1771	1896	1752	1932	13.00%
Education	1179	<b>1259</b>	614	935	914	713	641	1614	820	963	1259	7.00%
Home Utilities	2256	<b>3004</b>	2716	3166	2673	2638	1570	2505	2141	2763	1976	33.00%