The Good Life: What Albertans Want for Their Future
Summary of Research & Engagement Findings
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 engagement with members and stakeholders. Alberta is a diverse place. In many cases, there is 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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Acknowledgements

Research Partners
Janet Brown Opinion Research
Stone-Olafson

About the Study

This report is a summary of the findings of a survey by Janet Brown Opinion Research; results from nine province-wide focus groups conducted by Stone-Olafson in October 2021; and extensive engagement with other stakeholders and partners, including BCA’s Define the Decade Task Force and Prosperity Advisory Committee, BCA members and chief executives across Alberta, and over 150 interviews with stakeholders.

Surveys were administered by Trend Research between August 12 to 28, 2021. A total of 1,200 interviews were conducted with a random sample of Alberta residents, aged 18 years and over. A random sample of 1,200 is considered accurate to within plus or minus 2.8 percentage points, 19 times in 20.
Introduction

Alberta is at an inflection point in its history.

For generations, this province boomed and blossomed, thanks in part to the natural endowment of resources that lent to decades of prosperity but also to the characteristic resilience, hard work, and optimism of those who made this place their home.

However, global forces such as climate change, shifting population trends, and increasing complexity within geopolitical and economic systems; global events such as COVID-19; and internal challenges such as divisions and polarization have put the future prosperity of Albertans into sharp focus.

We now have the opportunity—and the imperative—to examine the world in which Alberta exists and competes and to set an intentional path forward for our collective, shared future.
Define the Decade is a journey to understand what a good life in Alberta could look like over the next decade. As part of our journey, we’ve looked at where Alberta stands today, from our economic profile to the strengths and challenges of various sectors. And we’ve looked at the global forces that present both challenges and opportunities for us on the pathway to building our future. As we come to Chapter 3 of our story, we look to understand what that future looks like—from Albertans themselves.

Key Publications

Chapter 1  Alberta’s Economy: An Overview
Chapter 1  Alberta Economy: Sector Snapshots
Chapter 2  Global Trends & Forces Impacting Alberta’s Future
Chapter 2  Alberta’s Place in the World: The Changing Context of International Trade
Chapter 3  The Good Life: What Albertans Want For Their Future
Define the Decade

In one of the most extensive research and engagement processes in the province in recent years, we spoke to thousands of Albertans about what they wanted the future of Alberta to be.

We engaged Albertans from all across the province; from a variety of life experiences, backgrounds, and identities; and from a range of expertise and thought leadership to ask them one question:

What is a good life in Alberta?

This report is a summary of how Albertans answered that question.
When asked about what they want for their future, Albertans told us three key things.

1. Albertans want both social & economic prosperity.

2. There are real tensions in the province, but there is more that unites us than divides us.

3. Albertans want to create opportunity for everyone.

The rest of this report explores each of these in detail, including how Albertans describe their ideal future, the values and beliefs that they hold today and underpin their future aspirations, and the challenges that we must address to build the future we want.
Albertans' Ideal Future
Albertans generally agree on their vision for the province.

While much has been made about divisions within the province, whether urban/rural, generational, or political ideology, there is broad agreement in what Albertans want their future to look like.

When asked what 4-5 words they would use to describe what they want life to look like in 10 years, common words used included:

- Opportunity
- Inclusive
- Innovative
- Diverse(ified)
- Equity
- United

What matters to Albertans is not so much the specific industries, jobs, or activities but more so the underlying enablers to achieving their vision for the province. It’s less about one type of job, for example, and more about the wider opportunity.

The word cloud above is a summary of the most frequently mentioned words about what makes a good life from thousands of Albertans.
Albertans also generally agree on what goals we should collectively prioritize over the next decade.

- Ensuring high-quality social services (including health care and education);
- Diversifying the economy, creating good jobs, continuing a strong energy sector, and ensuring Albertans have the skills required for the jobs of the future;
- Encouraging economic growth across the province and ensuring Alberta is an attractive place for investors;
- Recapturing our confidence and spirit of entrepreneurship and doing great things; and
- Being an inclusive place, attracting talented people to stay in Alberta, and encouraging younger Albertans to stay in the province.

Low taxes, a traditional point of pride for Albertans, are a mid-priority. This indicates that for Albertans today, low taxes alone are not the priority, but rather they must be tied to other goals such as creating opportunity and quality of life.
Priorities for the future: high importance

1. Ensuring a high quality health care system: 95% highly important, 4% mid-range.
2. Ensuring a high quality education system: 95% highly important, 4% mid-range.
3. Ensuring Albertans have skills for the jobs of the future: 93% highly important, 6% mid-range.
4. Diversifying Alberta's economy: 89% highly important, 9% mid-range.
5. Creating more good-paying jobs: 87% highly important, 12% mid-range.
6. Ensuring businesses see Alberta as an attractive place to invest: 86% highly important, 12% mid-range.

Averages:
- Ensuring a high quality health care system: 9.1
- Ensuring a high quality education system: 9.0
- Ensuring Albertans have skills for the jobs of the future: 8.7
- Diversifying Alberta's economy: 8.6
- Creating more good-paying jobs: 8.3
- Ensuring businesses see Alberta as an attractive place to invest: 8.3

Q: Thinking about the future of Alberta, and using a scale from zero to ten where zero means “not at all important” and ten means “extremely important”, how important is it to you that Albertans collectively prioritize each of the following goals over the next ten years?
Priorities for the future: mid-to-high importance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Highly important (7-10)</th>
<th>Mid (4-6)</th>
<th>Low (0-3)</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being an inclusive place for all</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging economic growth in rural areas</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attracting talented people to live and work in Alberta</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging economic growth in urban areas</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging younger Albertans to stay in Alberta</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconciliation with Indigenous communities</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q: Thinking about the future of Alberta, and using a scale from zero to ten where zero means “not at all important” and ten means “extremely important”, how important is it to you that Albertans collectively prioritize each of the following goals over the next ten years?
Priorities for the future: mid importance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Highly important (7-10)</th>
<th>Mid (4-6)</th>
<th>Low (0-3)</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balancing the provincial budget</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing affordable child care</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adressing climate change</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving Alberta's reputation in other parts of Canada</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting arts, culture, sport, and recreation</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having low personal taxes</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having low business taxes</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q: Thinking about the future of Alberta, and using a scale from zero to ten where zero means “not at all important” and ten means “extremely important”, how important is it to you that Albertans collectively prioritize each of the following goals over the next ten years?
Prosperity is more than just economic prosperity.

To Albertans, a prosperous Alberta is a mix of good jobs, a strong economy, opportunities for youth, and a sense of stability. It is rooted in unity, community, and diversity. Every Albertan has a role to play and must work against forces that are divisive.

A prosperous Alberta is also seen as one where Albertans have access to well-paying jobs and opportunities, can afford to have basic needs met, and do not have to make trade-offs for a quality of life. Everyone can afford to have work/life balance.
Prosperity is more than just economic prosperity.

I want Alberta to find its purpose. Alberta needs to grow to sustain business and grow business outside of oil and gas.

My best Alberta is one that keeps investing in our children.

A strong 5G network across Alberta, including rural areas, creates a competitive advantage.

Prosperous isn’t rich; it is quality of life.

Anyone who wants to have a job should be able to have one.

No homelessness, more support for our health care system. More money, more job openings.

Having more people coming in, more diversity, immigration.

A city I can afford to live in. Has a decent cost of living, but has good services and things I can do.
The Vision for Alberta's Future

Key Insights

Albertans largely agree on what they believe is a good life in the future. A vision for Alberta's future must encompass prosperity and opportunity; innovation; and inclusion and belonging.

This vision must ensure that the prosperity we create is more than economic, that quality of life, affordability, investment in youth, and inclusion are prioritized as much as economic growth, investment, and employment.
Albertans' Values, Attitudes & Beliefs
Despite current economic challenges and political frustrations, Albertans are generally optimistic about the future.

Albertans believe themselves to be resilient. The optimism they feel for the future is driven by the people and businesses of the province.

What gives Albertans hope?

- Resilient attitude of fellow Albertans
- Skilled, talented, and hard-working people
- Community and desire to care for one another
- Unity and opportunity to work together
- The "can do" spirit of working together to get things done
Albertans are also optimistic about their economic future.

Q. Looking 10 years into the future, would you say you are very optimistic, somewhat optimistic, somewhat pessimistic, or very pessimistic about Alberta’s economic prospects?

Albertans believe in the province’s economic future. When asked how optimistic they felt about their economic prospects, nearly two-thirds of Albertans were either very optimistic or somewhat optimistic, a steady increase from just over half in March 2020.

Q. Looking 10 years into the future, would you say you are very optimistic, somewhat optimistic, somewhat pessimistic, or very pessimistic about Alberta’s economic prospects?
When looking at the values, attitudes, and beliefs that underpin both the goals for the future and Albertans' optimism, Albertans generally align on some aspects of who we are but feel tension on a few others.

Values, attitudes, and beliefs that Albertans generally agree on:

- Alberta has a strong entrepreneurial spirit.
- Business is a force for good in society, that when business does well, they do well.
- Alberta does not have a good reputation within Canada.

Values, attitudes, and beliefs that Albertans experience more tension:

- Alberta is welcoming, equitable, open to new ideas, and inclusive.
- The best path forward for the oil and gas industry.
Entreprenurialism is a deeply embedded and unique value for Albertans.

There is a strong entrepreneurial spirit in Alberta

While often lauded anecdotally among Albertans, the belief that Alberta is entrepreneurial is a very real phenomenon. It is baked into the values of Albertans, runs deep across the province, and is often spoken about Alberta externally. This aspect of our identity and beliefs about ourselves is unique and not found everywhere. The vision for Alberta’s future should build off this unique and special character that both Albertans and others recognize about us.
The reputation of business in Alberta is strong. Additionally, Albertans agree that business has an essential and broader role in society to improve both economic and social prosperity.

Albertans generally agree that Alberta businesses have a crucial role to play in building prosperity, and business leaders are confident that they can help. To help enable prosperity, Albertans are looking for businesses to provide good wages; to invest in more opportunities for youth, mental health, and training; and pay more taxes. Business leaders should continue to do these things to continue to build and maintain trust with Albertans.
While the reputation of business is strong, the majority of Albertans believe that Alberta's reputation within Canada is struggling. While the reputation of business is strong, the majority of Albertans believe that Alberta's reputation within Canada is struggling.

Alberta has a good reputation in Canada

- **Strongly agree**: 39%
- **Somewhat agree**: 30%
- **Somewhat disagree**: 37%
- **Strongly disagree**: 21%
- **Not sure**: 3%

Less than 40% of Albertans believe that the province is well regarded by external stakeholders. Alberta needs to repair its reputation across Canada. Perceptions that Alberta is out of sync, not innovative, and nostalgic about the past are limiting future prosperity. For business leaders, specifically, there is concern that this reputation is limiting the attraction of both investment and talent.
In fact, there is some discrepancy between what Albertans believe about ourselves and how we are seen by others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How we see ourselves</th>
<th>How others see us</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Alberta is well-positioned for the economy of the future.</td>
<td>✓ Alberta is well-positioned for the economy of the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ People are comfortable living in Alberta.</td>
<td>✗ Half of Canadians would not be comfortable living in Alberta.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Alberta is welcoming and Albertans care about others.</td>
<td>✗ Alberta is not a welcoming place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Albertans care about climate change.</td>
<td>✗ Albertans don’t care about climate change.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Janet Brown Opinion Research, December 2021
Albertans generally believe that the energy industry is important to Alberta's future, but it's "energy and..."

Albertans acknowledge that the energy industry will be vital to the future success of the province; however, we can’t rely on oil and gas the way that we used to. For Alberta to be prosperous, Albertans and business leaders believe that we must expand our thinking. Albertans believe that other opportunities (e.g., renewables/nuclear/hydrogen; technology/AI/ML; tourism; agriculture/ag tech) must work alongside our energy sector to enhance and ensure future prosperity.
Albertans welcome immigration and want this to be a place of equal opportunity; however, there is still work to do.

On the whole, Alberta benefits from immigration to the province from other countries

Alberta is a place where everyone has the opportunity to succeed, regardless of background

Albertan embrace and are open to new ideas and perspectives

Equity of opportunity and Alberta’s openness to people and new ideas are seen differently throughout the province. While most Albertans affirm that Alberta benefits from immigration, less than two-thirds of Albertans agree that there is equitable opportunity for success for all. A vision for Alberta’s future must focus on ensuring Alberta is a welcoming, inclusive place, with opportunities for everyone.
The Vision for Alberta's Future

Key Insights

- Entrepreneurialism is a deeply held and embedded value among Albertans and should be included as an underlying principle for the vision and plan for Alberta's future.
- Business has a role to play in building both social and economic prosperity.
- Energy is viewed as a vital aspect of Alberta's future, but we cannot continue to rely on it in the future as we have in the past.
- We must invite new thinking to build Alberta's future into a place that is seen as welcoming, inclusive, open—and creates limitless opportunity for everyone.
Key Challenges to Overcome
There are still two big challenges standing in our way.

1. Albertans believe that opportunity is being held back by divisions within the province and the lack of a long-term plan.

2. How Alberta is seen outside, and sometimes in Alberta. Our brand, our reputation, even our esprit de corps is damaged.
Albertans are concerned by what they see as the trajectory of the province, but there is genuine hope that things can get better.

Albertans' top five concerns

**NO LONG-TERM PLAN**
Albertans want a plan above all else to help position the province for prosperity. Albertans feel frustrated by what they see as short-sightedness and a lack of long-term, strategic thinking.

**INDUSTRY DIVERSIFICATION**
Albertans want to be a part of the energy evolution. They are concerned by the lack of industry diversification and see missed opportunities for Alberta in other industries such as agriculture, value-added processing, and tech.

**LACK OF OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUTH**
Albertans want to create opportunities for youth and encourage them to stay in the province. They are concerned that there appears to be a lack of investment, training, and good opportunities for youth.

**DIVISIONS WITHIN ALBERTA**
Albertans believe that building our future requires collaboration and a sense of shared future. They feel the community is at risk from further division.

**LEADERSHIP**
Albertans believe that good governance will be vital for our future. They are frustrated with the lack of a long-term plan from leadership today which impedes our future prosperity. Albertans want to see new thinking in provincial leadership to achieve our goals.
The Vision for Alberta's Future

Key Insights

- Above all else, Albertans want an optimistic vision and plan to position the province for success—and to ensure that everyone is included in the opportunity for success.
- Albertans want to be at the forefront of solving big challenges, from climate change to feeding a growing world. A vision for Alberta's future must be innovative and solutions-oriented.
- Collaboration, integration, and unity are vital aspects of our province's future success. A vision for Alberta's future must work through divisions and provide a North Star to working together to develop our shared future.
To be successful, we must be able to articulate a way forward through an optimistic vision and plan.

This includes a vision that is
- Unifying
- Aspirational
- Inclusive
- Optimistic
- Grounded in reality
- People-centric

This includes a plan that
- Provides stability
- Is strategic and long term
- Prioritizes diversification while maintaining strength in traditional sectors
- Invests in youth
- Protects the environment
- Supports a better quality of life
- Captures new thinking
Putting it together, an ideal Alberta... 

Everyone comes together. We have unity, less division, and more tolerance.

Is more strategic, long term

Has better social services (for seniors, education, health care)

There is diversity in people and ideas

New people want to come here

There is more work/life balance. Quality of life is better—people can enjoy time off, reset, take mental health breaks, care for families

People want to stay here, raise their families

Is inclusive and safe for everyone

Creates good-paying jobs

Youth are a top focus—access to great education, opportunities for them, investment in them

Sees economic growth—there is money, the economy is diversified
Define the Decade is a vision for the future of Alberta and a pathway to achieve that vision. To learn more about this project and read the other Chapters in this story, please visit DefinetheDecade.com