



the  
*alex.*

Health.  
Home.  
Humanity.

2020-2021 Annual Report



### Our mission

To improve quality of life through accessible and integrated health, housing and social services.



### Our Vision

The Alex envisions a healthy and caring community where everyone is valued and can thrive.

## Message from our CEO

Each year the Annual Report becomes an exercise in reflection, and an inspiration to move forward. What we've accomplished can only be matched by what we hope to do in the future. By the time we put pen to paper, we have often already blown past any goal posts we had laid for ourselves, and the constraint of our fiscal year storytelling means we have to wait another year to share what just came around the corner.

So what you are reading today is a slice of what now feels like "the new Alex Community Health Centre" or "Alex 2.0" as I sometimes call it. Would I love to take a breath and step back and marvel at what we have done? Absolutely! But as we all know, time waits for no one.

As an organization that has a deep history of adapting, growing and shifting to meet new challenges, this "pandemic year" has been nothing short of wondrous in how it has shown what our steadfast team is capable of. You will see this in our COVID overview, and the program spotlights, including our newest, hopefully temporary, Assisted Self-Isolation Site.

This year also saw the fruits of our research labours - seeds of discovery now grown into beautiful, tangible results, demonstrating that our model of care truly moves the needle on seemingly intractable issues like poverty, homelessness, food insecurity and mental health and addictions.

This past year we also polished our look and brought new life to how we tell the story of The Alex. You will feel that change in this report, as well as on our website. As part of this process, we also refreshed our Mission and Vision and developed a new set of Alexean values to guide our staff.

These values have really been demonstrated over the past 12 months of equal parts pandemic and business-as-usual Alex work. **We connect** - to our community, to our stakeholders, to each other. **We care deeply** for one another and the community we serve. **We have grit**, and that has been sometimes the only way to get things done in these times. **We promote empowerment** - of our staff to learn and share, and of our community to live their best lives. **We take responsibility**, and make a promise to our funders and stakeholders that we will manage with transparency. **We are welcoming** to everyone who walks through our doors, and we sure met a lot of new faces this year. And finally, **we are change-makers**. Just read on and you will see how we are moving people from crisis to wellness and from challenge to change.



Joy Bowen-Eyre, CEO

## Message from our Board Chair

As the chair of The Alex Board of Directors, I have the opportunity to see first-hand the incredible work of our team of frontline, administrative and support staff. We have looked back at this past year with amazement at how we have adapted and continued to carry on through every challenge imaginable.

The board's responsibility to ensure good governance has never meant more than it has this year. We have had to convene at all hours to make fast decisions. Will we start running a hotel? Will we ask our funders to shift their commitments from in-house programming to other needs, like PPE expenses? Will we be able to ensure our staff have the mental health supports they need to get through these times? We've said yes to all of these decisions, and started the ASIS program, worked diligently with our funders to ensure their dollars were making the largest impact, and instituted "COVID days" where our staff could take a breath and take some time for self care.

Throughout these times, the Board of Directors has watched The Alex really step into a leadership role in our community. We've shared our best

practices for COVID-safe workspaces, and we have been leaders in the vaccination efforts for those in our community. Our medical team has been working around the clock, and I would like to publicly thank Dr. Kerri Treherne and Dr. Erik Singendonk for their tireless efforts to keep us safe and to stay on top of ever-changing guidelines.

Hopefully next year's annual report will see COVID in the rear view mirror and we will be sharing more stories of in-person programs, community connection and fun staff events. Until then, I know that our team will keep doing what we do best - bringing health, home and humanity to our community.



Dustin Owens, Board Chair



## Inspired by hope

Responding to shifting guidelines, overcoming technical hurdles, building new programs, maintaining our areas of strength and ensuring our teams are safe, both physically and emotionally – this has been the drumbeat of the The Alex throughout the pandemic.

Phone banks, laptop drives and curbside visits were the new ways of providing social supports to our community this past year. We brought the social work teams from all our programs together to collaborate and share resources, and provided phone and online support for 4,201 youth, adults and seniors who needed help with basic needs, referrals, and human connection.

As the pandemic began, The Alex Community Food Centre in Greater Forest Lawn became one of few places where our community could safely gather. Making use of our large parking lot and outdoor garden space, our team prepared thousands of takeout meals and curbside meal kits, and provided affordable produce markets and resource fairs so that Calgarians could safely access healthy food and stay connected.

We worked around the clock to ensure that participants in our housing programs felt safe and supported. Providing meals, books, video games, and art supplies helped reduce stress and keep folks in their homes. We reached out to ask for computers, smart phones and accessible washrooms for our case managers to use when all public facilities were closed so that they could safely conduct “curbside care” and be lifelines for those who were having a difficult time.

All of our programs stayed open and accessible to our community, addressing the social and environmental factors that can shape people’s lives at any time, including financial and housing instability, addiction and mental health, and social and community inclusion.

What continues to carry us forward through these times is knowing that we have proven we are a strong, resilient organization that, when called upon, can continue to respond to new crises while maintaining quality care for both our community and our staff teams.

**Read about our pandemic response and watch our videos at [thealex.ca/our-pandemic-year](http://thealex.ca/our-pandemic-year)**

**“ASIS was an integral part of our emergency shelter’s COVID response, and its presence was one of the main ways we mitigated COVID risk and outbreaks over the past year and a half at The Mustard Seed.”**

In mid-March 2020, at the onset of the pandemic, The Alex was approached by Community and Social Services to assist with setting up and running a facility to provide an emergency COVID-19 isolation plan for people experiencing homelessness in Calgary.

The Alex, in partnership with Alberta Health Services, the Calgary Homeless Foundation, HomeSpace, The City of Calgary, and CUPS, was asked to present a proposal to accommodate individuals who were significantly ill, diagnosed with COVID-19, experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, or recovering from COVID-19, or who had been in close contact with a confirmed positive case of COVID-19.

As proposed, the Assisted Self-Isolation Site (ASIS) provided a blended housing and health model of care with comprehensive, wraparound services provided by an interdisciplinary team that included physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses (registered and licensed practical nurses), client support workers and pharmacists.



## A call to action

ASIS was very successful in retaining clients until they completed their stays, likely because satisfaction with the program was so high (96% reported being happy with the care provided).

An unexpected benefit was that we were also able to house 437\* Calgarians following their ASIS stay: 243 obtained some form of supportive housing and 194 were independently housed. In addition, where possible, attempts were made to treat serious health conditions during their stay and to connect clients with family physicians, particularly via CUPS, at the end of their stays.

ASIS is still in operation, and will continue to support our province’s COVID response, working to ensure everyone has access to a safe place to isolate, and that connection to additional resources, health care, and mental health supports are as easy as calling for room service.

\*Measured between March 15, 2020 - July 31, 2021

# Our theory of change

We know that by improving these five key areas, people who face barriers are better able to take control of their lives, achieve their goals, participate fully in all desired aspects of life and experience improved quality of life.



Improved Physical Health



Improved Mental Health



Improved Financial Stability



Improved Social Support



Improved Housing Stability

# Measuring our success

At The Alex, we want to help people as much as we possibly can. This means we need high-quality data to assess well-being and measure program impact, ensure program effectiveness, and meet stakeholders' accountability requirements.

To these ends, in 2019 The Alex introduced case record management (CRM) software that has been tailored to collect demographic data and track life course data, record types and numbers of services and activities by unique individual, and measure changes in outcomes using validated questionnaires. These questionnaires were identified using specific criteria including but not limited to reading level, cost, psychometrics, suitability for use with vulnerable populations, and alignment with The Alex 's theory of change.

Data are extracted from the CRM and analyzed in SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) using the appropriate statistical methods at intervals to measure changes and assess program impact. When outcomes are positive, we celebrate; when we don't see the changes we'd hoped for, we dig deep into the data and consult with community members and staff to figure out what we need to do differently to improve our impact.

***Read our full 2020-21 Impact Report at [thealex.ca/our-impact](https://thealex.ca/our-impact)***





# COMMUNITY

## **Program Highlights: Community Health Centre**

Across Canada, millions of Canadians currently are without a family doctor, a nurse practitioner or other regular primary care provider. Worse still, far too few primary care services are integrated and delivered via healthcare teams.\*

The good news is that we already have a road map for how to accomplish this within our publicly-funded health system. Community Health Centres (CHCs) have been leaders in interprofessional primary health care for decades, ensuring that people receive comprehensive care from the right provider, at the right time. This makes best use of resources and helps to overcome gaps in timely and equitable access to health care.

The Alex's model of integrated medical and social supports gives our staff at the Community Health Centre incredible flexibility and a full range of tools to address community members' needs.

In 2020 The Alex Community Health Centre piloted a new program called the Advance Access Initiative to develop new strategies to improve no-show rates and increase patient satisfaction. The pilot was a great success and will be rolled out to all of our physician teams.

\*<http://www.cachc.ca/chcs-evidence-impact/>

## **Program Highlights: Seniors Health Centre**

As we age, many challenges arise, including physical, social and financial barriers to a good quality of life. These include social isolation, financial insecurity, barriers to transportation, and lack of support networks, resulting in poor physical and mental health. Finding the right care provider to help navigate all of these concerns can help seniors stay connected to their community and loved ones, while keeping their independence.

The Alex Seniors Health Centre provides a place for health and wellness and also for real human connection. Volunteering, meeting new people, and getting help navigating the healthcare system all contribute to having something to look forward to, making life meaningful.

Special attention focuses on reducing accessibility barriers and engaging a comprehensive wraparound approach to service delivery - a model of care that addresses social, health, and financial needs with particular attention towards building wellness and quality of life.



# SENIORS



## Chris' story

Imagine that your body is fighting against you at every turn, calcifying your bones, resulting in crippling headaches, weakness, stiffness of your arms and legs and ongoing abdominal pain. This has always been part of Chris' life, as he was born with a genetic disorder called Pseudohypoparathyroidism, which blocks the parathyroid hormone from regulating his calcium levels.

Chris was diagnosed as a baby. The doctors told his parents he wasn't going to live long and would likely never walk. Overwhelmed by the diagnosis, they placed him in foster care. But even as a baby, Chris was a fighter. Now in his 40s, he can walk with minimal issues and can even drive, though the pain continues to be present in his daily life.

Since this challenging beginning, Chris has experienced a lot of factors that have prevented him from living a happy, healthy life. As he tells his story, he admits that things had been rocky for a long while after he lost his teen-aged daughter. Many years in Vancouver were spent using and dealing drugs, and a move to Calgary was an attempt at a fresh start.

Chris' daughter Samantha was his bright light. She shared the same genetic condition as Chris, but it affected her much more. Her lungs never fully developed, and calcification of her arms and legs meant she was in a wheelchair. Samantha was funny, caring, and never let what she couldn't do get her down. She would post make-up videos on YouTube where she'd show other kids how to do beautiful eyeshadow and mascara. In those videos she'd discuss bullying and encouraged other kids to be kind and accepting of those with disabilities. Chris shows off her videos beaming with fatherly pride.

"I used to take her to the park, take her to get Happy Meals at McDonald's, feed the ducks at the park. I'd do her hair and nails and buy her nice dresses. She loved Barbies – she had the corvette, the house - everything. I tried my best. I would never put her in danger. She was my number one priority."

In 2013, Samantha passed away, and Chris' substance use and gambling addictions worsened to fill the void she left behind.

"I started drinking even worse because I had no purpose now. I had nothing."

Chris tried to push through and keep working but struggled to stay employed: if it wasn't the drinking that led to losing a job, it was the physical toll that minimum wage work had on his fragile health. He still feels the long-term effects of several on-the-job injuries, as his alcoholism had made it hard to access health care.

"I went to a doctor's office in Calgary but I kept missing the appointments because I was drunk all the time and couldn't remember. Eventually the doctor said 'Chris I can't have you as a patient anymore' and kicked me out of the clinic."

Chris was also struggling to meet his basic needs. There were holes in his shoes, he couldn't pay rent, and because he wasn't seeing a doctor and didn't have coverage, he wasn't able to get the medications he needed to manage his thyroid condition.

One day, Chris walked into the Bowness Community Centre for a food hamper. After telling a volunteer about himself, she recommended Chris go to The Alex for support. When he agreed she called and made an appointment for him.

Chris didn't expect much from The Alex, considering he'd been rejected by so many other service providers.

"I came in for the interview and they accepted me right away. Dr. Sun was the first doctor that could tolerate me at the time."

After finally finding a place where he was accepted and not judged, Chris' life started improving. He stopped drinking, and though he still struggles with gambling, he credits the pandemic with getting it down to a "dull roar."

In addition to a doctor, Chris also sees a mental health counsellor at The Alex, who has helped him understand the psychological factors of his addictions, and to heal, build strength and resilience. He made a big step in the right direction recently when he banned himself from online gambling websites through the Alberta Gaming Liquor Commission (AGLC), which means if he tries to access them again, the site will automatically block him.

Today, Chris lives in a cozy basement suite in Taradale and has been there for two years. He also has a girlfriend who he credits as being one of the reasons he gets up in the morning.

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***"It was every little step up that got me where I am. Each small thing I did I made a better decision."***

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"She also helps me with the gambling. When I say we should go to the casino she says no," he laughs.

Chris owns a truck, a French bulldog named Gunner, and a home sound system with subs, all of which give him joy. He'll take any opportunity to show you pictures of his life these days. He looks so happy as he talks about off-roading in his truck or the birthday party he threw for Gunner.

Now that he has consistent, compassionate care at The Alex, Chris has also been managing his thyroid condition much better. He says he only has bad days when he misses his medications.

Chris has also been seeing a social worker at The Alex, who has helped him with claims for his workplace injuries and with some of the fines he's accrued. He says it's been a huge help because the justice system is complicated. They go to court with him, advocate for him, and help navigate the process.

Chris says he kept coming to The Alex because they showed him that there was more to him than he could see through his addictions. When he comes to The Alex he can see his doctor, counsellor, and social worker all in one trip, allowing him to get the wraparound support he needs without having to tell his story over and over again.

"[The Alex] gives you the tools, but you gotta be resourceful, you gotta be a survivor. Drugs can take you down or you can take it down. If you asked how I got to where I'm at, I couldn't tell you. What made me change? It was every little step up that got me where I am. Each small thing I did I made a better decision."



# ADDICTION

## **Program Highlights: Rapid Access Addiction Medicine**

Nationally in 2020, 6,214 Canadians died of an apparent opioid overdose (approximately 17 deaths per day). A number of factors have likely contributed to the increase in overdose deaths, including the increasingly toxic drug supply, increased feelings of isolation during COVID-19, and stress and anxiety and limited accessibility of services for people using substances. A total of 21,174 Canadians lost their lives due to an opioid poisoning between January 2016 and December 2020.\*

Rapid Access Addiction Medicine (RAAM) is a self-referred substance use service that provides short-term wraparound care including medication, counselling, peer support and groups. We support people in early recovery by helping them gain stability and referring them on to longer-term services.

RAAM fills a void in the addiction treatment landscape by providing same-day access to a medically-supported addiction treatment plan, with a patient-centered approach to care.

**158** people received 1,965 addiction treatment sessions

\*Health Canada. (2021). Opioid and stimulant related harms in Canada. Retrieved from <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/substance-related-harms/opioids-stimulants/>

## **Program Highlights: Youth Health Centre**

Adolescence and early adulthood are accompanied by numerous life milestones such as graduation, a search for self-identity and independence, first jobs, and moving out from the family home.

To reach these milestones, young people's mental, physical and social health needs must be supported. Many of the street-connected youth we see have recurring themes such as poverty, dysfunctional family life, violence, sexual and physical abuse, underlying mental illness, or parental drug use.

The Alex Youth Health Centre (YHC) strives to identify and serve at-risk youth with easy-access low-barrier services, and wraparound supports. Often youth come in with multiple presenting concerns. Having a team comprised of multidisciplinary roles can aid in supporting and addressing each concern across the youth's life in a one-stop shop. By having physicians, nurses, social workers, on-site blood work and pharmacy, and mental health professionals under one roof, the Alex YHC can decrease barriers to care and improve the physical and social aspects of a youth's life.



# YOUTH



## Jordan's story

On an unseasonably hot day in June, Jordan visited The Alex Youth Health Centre. She'd heard about The Alex years ago from a friend, but didn't know much about it. As she bled from her wrist that afternoon, it was the only place she could think of to go.

Jordan had always struggled with self-harm and today was particularly difficult. Even though she was feeling desperate, Jordan knew she didn't want to go to the hospital. She'd been through that before and knew that this time she needed more than a bandage on her wrist and a night in the psych ward. Yes, Jordan was in distress, but she wasn't suicidal. In fact, she saw cutting herself as a way to cope.

"I need help," Jordan said to Meghan, the social worker who greeted her as she arrived at The Alex. As she held up her arm, Meghan moved calmly but quickly. "Come with me," she said. "We're going to help you." Meghan asked nurse Caitlyn to join them in an exam room to treat Jordan's wound.

When someone comes to The Alex who has harmed themselves, it is protocol for a physician to do a psychiatric assessment to determine whether that person needs to be admitted to a hospital or if they can be discharged. So, while Caitlyn cleaned and bandaged Jordan's wound, Meghan walked down the hall to talk to the doctor on shift at The Alex that day.

Dr. Clain was able to see Jordan right away. She did an extensive assessment, asking her lots of questions and doing a physical exam. During the assessment Jordan mentioned that about a week ago she ran out of the medication she'd been taking to treat her depression. She

couldn't renew the prescription because she lost her part-time job at a coffee shop and couldn't afford it anymore. The Alex always has common medications on hand in case of an emergency like this, so Dr. Clain gave Jordan a 2-week supply so she could immediately resume her regimen with the hope that her mental health could stabilize.

Dr. Clain concluded that Jordan did not need to go the hospital, but that mental health support was still needed immediately. Moments later, Dr. Clain brought in a mental health clinician at The Alex named Elaine. With a bandage on her wrist and a bottle of her medication in her hand, Jordan followed Elaine into a quiet, comfortable office for same-day counselling.

Over the next half hour, Jordan and Elaine talked about what triggered her that day, and what tools she could use to stay safe over the next few days. Meghan met Jordan at Elaine's office door and led her to another office where they sat down.

"So," she said "you've got meds for the next couple of weeks but we need to apply for emergency medication coverage so you can stay on them after they run out. I know they're expensive normally, but it's really important that you don't stop taking them. This program is for people who can't afford their medications, so they'll be covered. Are you hungry?"

That last question took Jordan by surprise. That's not something you hear in a doctor's office. In fact, from everything she'd experienced so far, it was clear this place was unlike anywhere she'd been before.

"Uh, yeah" she said. "I haven't eaten all day." Meghan smiled, went to the fridge in another room and returned with a to-go box and a plastic fork. She encouraged Jordan to eat as they talked. Jordan opened the box expecting pasta or something like she would get from the food bank, but was pleasantly surprised to find a grilled chicken breast on a bed of fresh ceasar salad.

As Jordan ate, Meghan noticed the colour returning to her face. "Where are you living right now?" Meghan asked. Jordan started to talk about her situation. She talked about how she was living in a group home, but when she turned 18 last month, it meant she had aged out of the system. Without many other options, she moved in with her birth mother.

Jordan went on about how her mother and her mother's boyfriend Dave would disappear for days. And when they were home, Dave was not kind to Jordan – he wasn't very happy about having another mouth to feed, and when she lost her job, he became even more upset about her being there.

"I'd like you to come back here in a couple days" Meghan said. "We've made a referral for intensive case management, which means you can come back and see me regularly, and we can work together to improve your situation. We can find you somewhere safer to live and you can continue seeing Elaine for counselling – and none of it will cost you anything. Will you come back on Friday?" Jordan enthusiastically agreed.

Jordan was at The Alex for one hour. Her immediate needs like her self-

harm wounds and heightened emotional state were addressed first by a nurse and a doctor. She then saw a counsellor to help manage her distress in the short term. Jordan then saw a social worker to apply for medication coverage, eat a healthy meal, and create a plan to continue getting support over the next several months.

In one hour, Jordan received holistic, wraparound care from four practitioners that covered all aspects of her health. This model prevented Jordan from costing the system more by needing emergency services. It also enabled her to work with staff in the long term on the root mental health and housing issues she was facing.

After a day of crisis, then seeing all those people at The Alex, Jordan was utterly exhausted. But as she sat down in an empty seat on the train with a full belly and an appointment set for Friday, she felt relieved. It had been a long time since she felt cared for like that and was looking forward to going back. As she settled in for the ride, she leaned her head against the train window, smiled, and thought maybe everything will be okay after all.



# FOOD



## **Program Highlights: Community Food Centre**

Poverty and food insecurity are persistent problems. Food insecurity has lasting impacts on people's health: low-income Canadians are more likely to suffer from health problems like diabetes and other diet-related illnesses and tend to be isolated from their communities. Health-care costs for severely food insecure Canadians are 121% higher than those who are food secure\* and 40% of food insecure Canadians report struggling with anxiety and other mood disorders.\*\*

The Alex Community Food Centre (CFC) is a welcoming place for people to come together to grow, cook, share and advocate for good food for all. The CFC provides people with access to high-quality food in a dignified setting through healthy meals and an affordable produce market.

People learn cooking and gardening skills, and kids get their hands dirty in the garden and kitchen in ways that expand their taste buds and help them make healthier food choices. Community members find their voices on the issues that matter to them, and people find friends and support. The CFC offer multifaceted, integrated and responsive programming in a shared space where food builds health, hope, skills and community.

**39,421** meals prepared & distributed

\*Tarasuk, V., Cheng, J., de Oliveira, C., Dachner, N., Gundersen, C., & Kurdyak, P. (2015). Association between household food insecurity and annual health care costs. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 187(14), E429–E436.

\*\*Tarasuk, V., Cheng, J., Gundersen, C., de Oliveira, C., & Kurdyak, P. (2018). The relation between food insecurity and mental health care service utilization in Ontario. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, DOI: 10.1177/070674371775287

## **Program Highlights: Housing First Programs**

Both systemic and personal issues can contribute to homelessness. Lack of investments in affordable housing, boom and bust economies, discrimination, racism, colonialism and poverty are examples of systemic issues. Intergenerational trauma, addictions, mental health issues, and domestic violence are often personal responses to these system-wide challenges.\*

The Alex's Housing First programs include two housing scenarios with two programs each, providing subsidized housing and a myriad of physical health, mental health, and social supports, serving individuals with an experience of chronic homelessness.

### Place-Based Supportive Housing

Residents at The Prelude and Abbeydale have experienced a wide range of complex barriers related to long-term homelessness, such as mental and physical illness, chronic substance use, trauma, and complex medical challenges. Our residents have previously been high emergency service users, and require the support of a place-based congregate building that is staffed 24/7 to maintain housing.

This level of staffing allows the team to provide wraparound support at all times, which includes but is not limited to; medical care, medication assistance, financial support and housing subsidization, independent living and life skills support, activities of daily living (ADL) support, counselling and/or mental health supports, internal and external recreation groups, food and wellness supports, and harm reduction and/or substance use supports such as alcohol management.

### Scattered-Site Supportive Housing

Pathways to Housing is an Alex program rooted in the philosophies of Housing First, harm reduction, and Assertive Community Treatment - a team-based, intensive intervention for individuals whose mental illness creates a significant barrier to them accessing and effectively participating in treatment through regular community mental health programs.

HomeBase is an Intensive Case Management (ICM) program - a collaborative, community-based program that places the person at the centre of the program, and provide supports to sustain them while building their independence.

\*<https://www.calgaryhomeless.com/discover-learn/learn-about-homelessness/homelessness-in-calgary/causes/>



# HOUSING



# OUTREACH

## **Program Highlights: Mobile Health**

For many of us, booking our annual physical, renewing prescriptions, or being referred to medical specialists are routine activities. While we may feel some frustration with wait-times for tests or procedures, we are generally capable of navigating the system.

Despite accessible health care being a core Canadian value, some community members experience multiple, complex barriers to obtaining appropriate services. This can lead to unmanaged chronic health issues, poor general health, and strains on emergency departments and services.

In addition, there is significant overlap between health, mental health, social inclusion and poverty. For individuals facing numerous obstacles, an innovative, integrated approach to wellbeing is required.

The Community and Youth Health Buses function as mini community health centres, bringing wraparound care to those who may encounter challenges accessing or navigating the traditional healthcare system.

Staffed by a physician or nurse practitioner, a nurse, and a client resource specialist, the Youth Health Bus provides public high school students with judgment-free, accessible health and social care, most often relating to sexual and mental health. The Community Health Bus visits shelters and partner community organizations as well as supporting service provision at high schools.

**1,008** medical appointments seen even while the mobile buses paused for much of the pandemic year

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## **Program Highlights: Dental Health Programs**

Canada is among the world leaders when it comes the over all health of its citizens, however, poor oral health is experienced by those who do not have access to regular dental care. In Canada, an estimated 2.26 million school days are missed each year due to dental-related illness and recent findings suggest that oral diseases account for over \$1 billion per year in productivity losses.\*

Canadians with lower incomes and lower socio-economic status, those without dental insurance, older Canadians and Indigenous Canadians experience worse overall health outcomes than the general population. Also, Canadians from lower income families have worse outcomes in terms of oral health, more instances of untreated disease, lower rates of visiting a dentist, higher proportions of avoiding dental visits and greater frequency of declining recommended care due to costs.\*

The Alex Dental Health Programs, including our Dental Health Bus and partnering clinics, provide preventative and restorative dental care, primarily to working poor families who face barriers to accessing vital oral health care. Unable to qualify for government services and often too financially burdened to afford private dental costs, these families would otherwise fall through the cracks.

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***"My daughter is so happy now that her pain is gone. The money we saved can go back to support our family"***

***- Nadir, DHB participant***

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\*<https://www.cda-adc.ca/stateoforalhealth/snap/>



# DENTAL



## Liza & Tessie's story

Five years ago, Liza and her husband Nathan moved to Calgary from the Philippines. Liza was pregnant at the time and was excited to start a new life with her new family in Canada. But after his work contract expired, Nathan was denied immigrant status to remain in the country. He was forced to return home, leaving Liza and her infant daughter to learn a new language, culture and city alone.

Over the past year Liza has been going through the process of getting immigrant status herself. Until then, she can't work, get an Alberta Health Care card or health insurance. She lives in constant fear that she will be sent back to the Philippines or be separated from her now 5-year-old daughter Tessie, who was born in Calgary.

Without the ability to work, Liza relies on the friends and community she's found in Calgary.

"They helped me when I had my daughter and my husband had to go back. Now they help me get food. It's not just about the food though, it's great having people to talk to. With the pandemic, I don't know if it was depression, but with the help of the community I got through it. My husband has been away from me for five years. He's never met his daughter. And so it's hard because I don't have family here. So my community becomes my family here."

Tessie started kindergarten this year. She's a kind little girl who loves to

draw and play games and wants to be a ballerina when she grows up. Tessie has an Alberta Health Care card, but unfortunately that doesn't cover the health care Tessie needed most – dental.

A few years ago, Tessie started complaining of pain in her teeth. Liza called around to ask for help for her daughter but was told she'd have to pay hundreds of dollars just for a check-up. Without income, Liza had no options.

As Tessie's pain got worse, so did Liza's desperation. Tessie couldn't sleep or eat certain foods because of the pain. Every parent understands the heartbreak of seeing their child in pain, and nothing seemed to help. One fortunate day while volunteering, Liza met a woman who recommended The Alex.

Often new Canadians who are going through the immigration process are afraid to ask for help or provide information, worried that immigration may get involved. Indeed, Liza was worried, but she decided to trust her friend, be brave, and call The Alex Dental Health Bus. Tessie was able to see a hygienist on the bus within a few months.

"She enjoyed the bus. She wasn't scared and liked the people there. They taught her flossing and brushing and she has remembered everything they taught her."

Tessie learned a lot on the bus, but when the hygienist looked in her mouth, it was clear it was too late. Tessie needed treatment on all her top baby teeth and 4 lower baby teeth. She required teeth to be pulled, stainless steel crowns, fillings, and baby tooth root canals. She also had an infection in the upper left side of her mouth.

There is a lot the hygienists can do on The Alex Dental Health Bus, but because it's a mobile clinic, the capacity is limited. Cases like Tessie's need equipment and expertise that can only be found in a dental office. That's why over the past few years, the team at The Alex has been developing the Dental Access Network (DAN), which is a network of dental offices in Calgary that volunteer their time and resources to help kids like Tessie, whose family cannot afford the cost of dental procedures.

"It would've cost me thousands and thousands of dollars. I was in shock when I heard. I've heard that when people are immigrating to Canada they're told to get their dental work done at home before coming here because it's so expensive."

The Alex team referred Tessie to a dentist in northeast Calgary, and within two months she had her operation.

"I don't know what I can give back to The Alex community who helped me. I don't know what I can do. I cannot do anything about her teeth because I don't have money. Even if I don't have status I feel so blessed."

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***"If you need help, just go to The Alex. They ask 'what do you need?' Just go there and they can help you."***

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Seven months after the operation, Tessie is doing well. She's no longer in pain and brushes and flosses her teeth every day to prevent problems in the future. Her favourite part is gurgling the water and she laughs at the sound every time she does it.

Since her first experience with the Dental Health Bus, Liza has continued her journey with The Alex by volunteering at the Community Food Centre. She helped cook and package over 400 meals during the height of the pandemic for her neighbours. She enjoyed cooking and learning from the chef and sharing recipes from back home.

Liza plans to keep volunteering with The Alex, continuing to demonstrate that she has a lot to offer the community – a big heart, a lovely smile, and courage and resilience gained from her unique experiences and a strong community.

"I'm so glad because there's something for everybody [at The Alex], for food, market, dental and healthcare. All in one package. If you need help, just go to The Alex. They ask 'what do you need?' Just go there and they can help you. And if they can't help right away they find a way to help. They never say no."

# Our advocacy work

The following areas of focus reflect municipal, provincial and federal public policy levers for reducing poverty, creating equal opportunities for all to thrive, building strong communities, and enhancing the capacity of the non-profit sector.



## COVID Vaccinations

We have worked closely with the province and sector partners to successfully advocate for early vaccinations for vulnerable populations, and have taken an active role in providing vaccination clinics and vaccine education.



## Poverty Reduction

With seats on a sector-wide Social Policy Committee, we participate in active letter-writing campaigns and develop policy frameworks and recommendations.

On a provincial level, we recommend that AISH, PDD and other support programs be indexed to inflation, and are advocating federally for Universal Basic Income.



## Access to Emergency Health Care

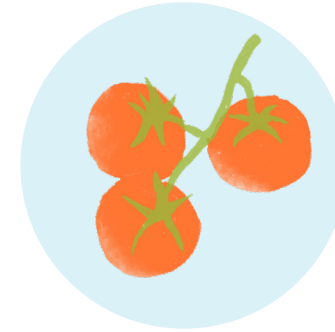
When we developed the Assisted Self Isolation Site (ASIS) to respond to COVID in the homeless population, we worked directly with Alberta Health Services to pilot a program to provide immediate access to medicine and other emergency services for our ASIS clients. This work has carried over to potential future collaborations within the shelter system.



## Mental Health & Addictions

Investment in access to mental health supports and addiction treatment across the continuum of recovery is key to a healthy community.

Our ongoing work includes informing and engaging provincial leaders on benefits of Rapid Access Addiction Medicine and enhanced mental health supports. We are an active part of the City of Calgary's Mental Health and Addiction Strategy.



## Food Insecurity

Access to healthy, affordable and culturally appropriate food is a physical necessity, a human right and critical for people to fully participate in society.

Through our work at the Community Food Centre, we are leading in approaches to addressing food insecurity, including advocating for a Universal Basic Income.



## Housing First

The Alex is a leader in Housing First programs and provides solid research and evidence of its effectiveness.

The Housing First philosophy should be cornerstone of most housing programs and a funding priority on both a provincial and federal level.



## Dental Prevention & Education

Without access to fluoridation (local level) or universal dental care (provincial/federal), early childhood & family education and prevention is key.

Our Dental Health Bus is seen as a leader in child & youth dental services (ages 6 and up). We work in concert with other dental organizations and networks to provide a voice for under-insured Calgarians.

# Special events



Teatro's Executive Chef **Matt Batey** joined in the Big Social in support of The Alex Community Food Centre, sharing his amazing risotto that you could make at home with a special meal kit made by Teatro.



Our first ever virtual fundraiser Press Play raised over \$30K for our youth health programs with the support of incredible partners like **kd lang** (above) and host **Dave Kelly** (right).



Bell Let's Talk Day gave our frontline staff a great opportunity to talk about their own mental health through the pandemic.



Our supporters came out in full force over the holidays, making over 1,000 totes we distributed to our community members in the month of December.



Our staff had some fun with their PPE to recognize World Oral Health Day and bring attention to how oral health affects overall health - something we know at The Alex!



The Perspectives Art Show encouraged our community members from all of our programs to create and sell their artwork to staff, family and friends.

# The Alex by the numbers

**1500**

elementary students  
received oral health education

**861**

children received  
preventative  
dental care

**4,137**

individuals  
visited us for

**49,655**

medical appointments  
at our CHC/YHC/SHC

**1,016**

people isolated  
at ASIS

**89%**

agreed they had the  
support they needed to  
complete their isolation

*“Ours is not the task of fixing  
the entire world at once, but  
of stretching out to mend  
the part of the world that is  
within our reach”  
– Dr. Clarissa Pinkola*

## Gratitude to our supporters

**66%**

of youth who received  
counselling reported a  
significant decrease in their  
psychological distress

**98%**

of formerly homeless people  
unable to live independently  
remained housed

**92%**

said the CFC was an  
important source of healthy  
food during the pandemic

*See all of our stats at [thealex.ca/our-impact](https://thealex.ca/our-impact)*

In 2020, you stretched out to make the lives of people The Alex walks alongside each day better. It has been a challenging year for everyone in our city and our world. The journey to health and wellness has been interrupted for many by COVID-19. Our community of donors has stepped up and stepped in to help. Your generosity inspires us every day.

You have looked beyond your own needs to offer help. You have provided direct financial support that has been invaluable for The Alex to remain open, accessible, creative and innovative. You have provided smartphones, laptops, masks, gift cards, personal hygiene items, holiday items and meals to ensure that people felt cared for and could stay connected with family, friends, doctors, mental health specialists and other supports. You have volunteered your time and come to help when possible.

We celebrate YOU! We celebrate individuals and families who have made significant contributions to The Alex to help us provide programs and support. We celebrate groups that have built virtual special events and

collection drives, encouraging their colleagues, friends and family to get involved. We celebrate companies, organizations and foundations in our city that have encouraged their employees to give and get involved, often from home, offering learning opportunities to help understand the difficulties others face.

The Alex experienced challenges in 2020, and we saw the very best our community has to offer. People came together, stretching out to offer support, stretching out to say “Yes” we can help.

Our work is not done. The people we work with each day need you more than ever to move from crisis to stability and from challenge to change. You make a difference.

*Visit our supporters list at [thealex.ca/our-supporters](https://thealex.ca/our-supporters)*



[www.thealex.ca](http://www.thealex.ca) @thealexchc info@thealex.ca

The Alex is a non-profit health and social services organization that has provided integrated and accessible supports and thoughtful, comprehensive care to Calgarians for almost 50 years. With a full complement of health, housing, and community programs, the Alex is a hub of supports and outreach services for people who are experiencing poverty, trauma, social isolation, or health challenges including addiction.

Our leadership team and Board of Directors represent a dedicated multi-disciplinary team of almost 400 staff including medical staff, social workers, mental health specialists, peer supporters, educators, community facilitators, and an outstanding support team. As a team we know it takes the combination of our unique skills and expertise to make a difference.

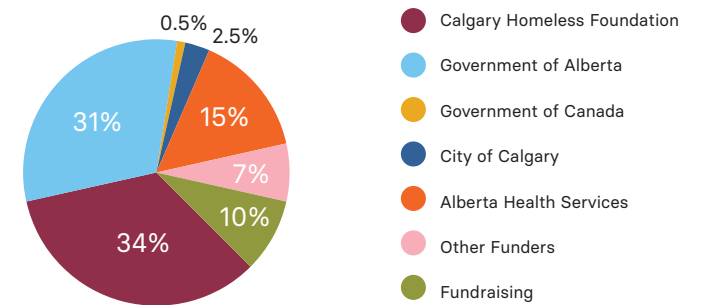
Registered Charitable #132824905RR0001

### 2020-2021 Board of Directors

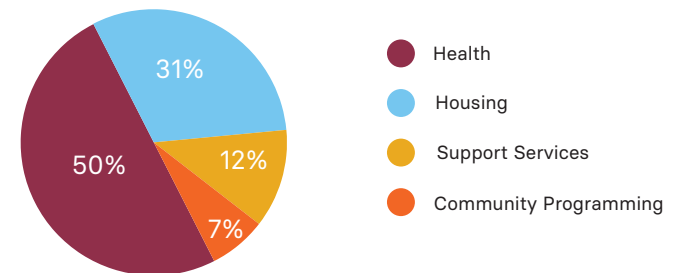
Dustin Owens, Chair  
 Jeff Meunier, Vice Chair  
 Janice Anderson, Treasurer  
 Danielle Ayana James, Secretary  
 David Bach, Director

Laurie Brown, Director  
 Judy MacDonald, Director  
 Doug Page, Director  
 David Pickersgill, Director

### Revenues



### Expenses



**See our 2020-21 audited financial statements at [thealex.ca/our-impact](http://thealex.ca/our-impact)**