

# Impact Report 2020-2021

Measuring our success

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## Theory of Change

The Alex recognizes that the most powerful determinants of health—and access to health care—are social (income, housing, employment, education) and behavioural (diet, substance use, physical activity). All these factors are intricately inter-related, with social factors influencing behaviours and behaviours shaping social factors.

Most Alex clients are socially and economically disadvantaged and in poor health. They struggle to cope with multiple, complex physical, mental, emotional, social, and addiction challenges. These challenges are often due to adverse childhood experiences, intergenerational trauma, risk factors accumulated over time, and current social and behavioural determinants of health.

Because Alex clients have poor health determinants and these determinants are inter-connected, so are Alex programs. We provide integrated, welcoming, dignified care across health, housing, and food and social programs for infants, youth, adults, and seniors. This way we can tackle challenges on all fronts to improve clients' physical and mental health, housing status, and income stability, and reduce social isolation, ultimately increasing clients' social inclusion and quality of life.



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**Our Mission:** To improve quality of life through accessible and integrated health, housing and social services.



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**Our Vision:** A healthy and caring community where everyone is valued and can thrive.

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## How we measure our impact

At The Alex, we want to help people as much as we possibly can. This means we need high-quality data to assess client wellbeing 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 client, and measure changes in client 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 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 clients and staff to figure out what we need to do differently to improve our impact.

# Program Overviews

Using the Theory of Change to improve determinants of health

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## Health. Home. Humanity.

The Alex works to improve access to health care; to provide excellent, full-scope medical services; and to improve the health outcomes of highly vulnerable people with multiple morbidities. Alex clients are people whose health and other challenges are too complex to be well managed in a conventional health care setting. At Alex health centres and clinics, clients have access to specialists along with lab services, a pharmacy, optometry, foot care, and massage therapy. In addition, thanks to an agreement between The Alex and Alberta Health, we don't work on a fee-for-service model, so physicians have more time to spend with clients to identify and address health issues. And, of course, The Alex has many other services to help address social and behavioural factors contributing to poor health.



# Improved physical health

## Community Health Centre / Seniors Health Centre / Youth Health Centre

The Alex's three primary health care clinics provide full-scope health care. The Seniors Health Centre is located in Calgary's East Village at the foot of three apartment buildings housing low-income seniors. The Community Health Clinic and Youth Health Centre are at opposite ends of the main Alex site, with each providing food and basic needs and social work along with medical care. The Youth Health Centre is an integrated youth hub that includes gender-affirming health and pre- and post-natal care. Services are provided in alignment with the Integrated Youth Services (IYS) model, which is the gold standard for health and mental health service delivery for adolescents and young adults and is aspired to across Canada.

### Output

**4,137**

unique individuals received 49,555 medical visits among the three clinics.

### Outcome

**41%**

of a sample of Community Health Clinic clients in poor or fair health improved by at least one level after six to 18 months of care.

66% and 65% respectively of samples of Community and Youth Health Centre clients reported that Alex services helped them to avoid serious problems like homelessness, jail, or hospital.

### Impact

The comprehensive health care provided at The Alex improved the health of clients with very complex health issues.

## Community and Youth Health Buses

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.

### Output

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# 353

unique individuals received 1,008 medical visits on the buses, even though the buses were paused for much of the pandemic.

### Impact

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Access to health care was improved for vulnerable youth, adults, and seniors, along with people experiencing homelessness, who otherwise might have been unable to obtain treatment.

## Dental Health Bus

The Alex Dental Health Bus (DHB) manages the delivery of both preventative and urgent dental care to children and youth in Calgary's higher need areas. The program includes Mobile Oral Health school services, Preventative Oral Health community clinics, and referrals to a Dental Access Network supported by local dentist volunteers in Calgary who offer restorative treatment to students and young people served by The Alex. After pausing the program in spring 2020 with the closure of schools and due to pandemic restrictions, the Dental Health Bus resumed its school program in November 2020.

### Output

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# 1500

elementary students received oral health education; 861 children received preventive dental care. Forty-five percent of school children had active, untreated dental decay.

### Outcome

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# 75%

of a sample of dental bus patients reporting pain in the mouth at intake reported no pain at follow up.  
86% of children who had missed school due to mouth pain were no longer missing school at follow up.

### Impact

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Low-income children received preventive and urgent dental care to which they would not otherwise have had access, preventing pain and further deterioration in their dental and physical health.



# Improved mental health & addiction management

## Rapid Access Addiction Medicine clinic

Launched in February 2020, The Alex's Rapid Access Addiction Medicine (RAAM) clinic seeks to decrease clients' substance use and its associated harms, improve clients' mental and physical health challenges associated with substance use and, by extension, reduce clients' health system utilization. The RAAM clinic sets clients up for success by providing medication-assisted recovery as well as psychosocial supports. The program fills a gap in the community by ensuring that, when a person makes the decision to address their addiction, immediate, unbiased, and stigma-free support is available and the "window of opportunity" is not missed. The RAAM clinic focuses on the early recovery period, with clients typically participating for three to six months before returning to their family physician or being linked with an appropriate provider with a plan for ongoing support and treatment.

### Output

**158**

people received 1,965 addiction treatment sessions primarily for alcohol, opioids, crack cocaine, and methamphetamine use.

### Outcome

**72%**

of opioid-dependent clients were initiated on pharmacotherapy.

Early evaluation results indicate improved physical and mental health and increased recovery capital.

### Impact

Immediate access to pharmacological treatment in conjunction with mental health therapies, addiction counselling, and peer support contributed to recovery for people who were ready to engage and try to move to recovery.

## Mental Health and Addiction Outreach Initiative

The Mental Health and Addiction Outreach Initiative (MAOI) is part of the prevention to recovery continuum of addiction and mental health services provided by The Alex. MAOI's goal is to prevent overdoses and other harms and to engage street-involved people experiencing addiction and mental health issues in Alex health, social, and mental health and addictions programming. Offering services on a mobile outreach basis increases the likelihood that at-risk individuals who would not normally access a traditional outpatient treatment program will be engaged, stabilized, and treated in an environment where they feel safe.

## Output

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# 976

contacts made with street-involved youth, distributing food, safe supplies, brief supportive counselling, and connections to Alex and other health, mental health, and addiction services.

## Impact

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MAOI prevented opioid overdoses and provided a pathway for street-involved people to engage in on-site programming, including case management and addictions medicine in conjunction with psychosocial supports.

### Youth and adult counselling and psychiatry

Counselling and psychiatric services are in great demand at The Alex and we struggle to meet the need. This is due to a general shortage of psychiatrists and mental health clinicians and insufficient funding for mental health which, other than psychiatry, is not covered by provincial health funding. The situation is best at the Youth Health Centre, where annual municipal grants have been obtained since 2019 to support a team of mental health therapists who provide counselling to youth aged 16 to 24.

## Output

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# 751

people received counselling or psychiatric services.

## Outcome

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# 66%

of youth who received counselling reported a significant decline in psychological distress despite the heightened acuity associated with the pandemic.

37% of youth at moderate or high risk of a substance abuse disorder reduced their risk level and 30% were assessed as being at low risk after six to 18 months of care.

## Impact

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Vulnerable adolescents and emerging adults, many of whom were street involved and most of whom had a history of trauma, got the help they needed to change their life course for the better.

# Health. Home. Humanity.

Several Alex programs help clients find, maintain, and retain suitable housing, but The Alex also specializes in housing people who have experienced chronic homelessness and is Calgary's first and largest provider of Housing First programs. Housing First is a model that works to rapidly house people experiencing homelessness so that they can then address other challenges and pursue personal goals, rather than declining housing until people have achieved specific goals, often related to mandatory sobriety. The Housing First model has been repeatedly demonstrated to be more successful than older approaches in helping people to obtain and retain housing. The Alex introduced its first housing program, Pathways to Housing, in 2007 upon request by a funder to house Calgarians experiencing homelessness as well as a serious mental illness and a co-occurring addiction. Thanks to the success of Pathways, three other programs—HomeBase, Abbeydale Place, and The Prelude—were introduced in later years.



## Improved housing stability

### Housing First programs

The Alex provides three types of Housing First programs:

- Pathways to Housing supports independent living in the community, specifically targeting chronically homeless people with addiction, a psychiatric diagnosis, and a multitude of health and social issues, usually including involvement with the justice system. To help sustain housing, Pathways clients receive medical and psychiatric treatment and supports with daily living provided by a professional Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) team.
- HomeBase, also a “scattered site” housing program, targets chronically homeless people with serious mental illnesses but typically without a history of multiple psychiatric hospitalizations and functional impairment. Independence is the goal, with clients receiving Intensive Case Management (ICM), a team-based approach to treatment in which case managers carry a caseload of clients to whom they provide direct support and for whom they broker services.
- Place-based permanent supportive housing (PBPSH) is provided in two apartment buildings for individuals with chronic illnesses, disabilities, mental health issues, and substance use disorders who have experienced long-term or repeated homelessness. Support services are provided 24 hours a day and include case management.

## Outputs

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# 372

people were housed in an Alex Housing First program: 42 people in Permanent Supportive Housing, 175 in Pathways to Housing, and 155 in HomeBase.

## Outcomes

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# 98%

formerly chronically homeless people (41 residents) with trimorbidities who were unable to live independently remained consecutively housed in Alex Permanent Supportive Housing apartment buildings.

154 formerly chronically homeless people with persistent psychiatric illness and justice system involvement (88% of residents) remained consecutively housed in the Pathways to Housing program.

135 formerly chronically homeless people with severe physical and mental health and addictions issues (87% of residents) remained consecutively housed in the fiscal year.

## Impact

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Formerly homeless people with many challenges remained safely housed and lived in greater harmony with their neighbours and community members.

## Assisted Self Isolation Site

At the onset of the pandemic, The Alex was approached by the provincial government to assist with setting up and running a facility to provide an emergency COVID-19 isolation plan for people experiencing homelessness in Calgary. Within a few days, the Assisted Self-Isolation Site (ASIS) was accommodating 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. Access to ASIS is voluntary and eligible participants present with many challenges including substance use disorders, mental health co-morbidities, a history of trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and complex chronic medical conditions, among others. Many have acute infectious diseases and chronic diseases such as diabetes, which are often untreated. ASIS continues to provide a blended housing and health model of care with comprehensive, wrap-around services provided by an interdisciplinary team of physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, client support workers, and pharmacists.

## Output

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**1,016**

people isolated at the site one or more times for a total of 1,660 stays in the fiscal year.

## Outcome

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**76%**

of ASIS participants successfully completed isolation and stayed off the streets.

## Impact

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ASIS contained and reduced the very high risk of transmission of COVID-19 by people experiencing homelessness among themselves and the broader population.

# Health. Home. Humanity.

Due to the experience of adversity in childhood, trauma over the life course, mental health challenges, and low literacy levels, most Alex clients live in deep poverty, historically in tenuous housing conditions or homelessness, and they are socially isolated: Many say that their relationship with their Alex physician or other primary care provider is the only trusting relationship they have. The Alex meets people wherever they are in their journey. We apply a trauma-informed lens and take a harm reduction approach to everything we do. In addition, we have programs that work to directly increase clients' income and housing stability by helping them to get the benefits to which they are entitled, providing living skills training, supporting relationships with landlords, and improving clients' social connections, which can sometimes launch a virtuous circle of life improvement.



## Improved income stability

### Youth and adult case management

Case management is provided by social workers in many Alex programs, most recently at the Youth Health Centre. In fall 2020, based on outcome data, the decision was made to tip the balance of services from “light touch” support to more case management in the YHC, with heightened fidelity to proven models. Case management uses motivational interviewing, solution-focused counselling, and intensive supports to help youth move forward with their lives and to avoid becoming lifelong Alex clients. Case managers assist youth to create a plan to achieve goals most often in areas such as securing stable housing, addressing legal issues, getting help with substance abuse and mental health issues, and re-connecting with family or other support systems—whatever it takes to get the young person's life on track.

## Output

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**368**

youth and adults received case management services.

## Outcome

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**47%**

of a sample of youth reporting poor living conditions at intake reported significant improvements at six to 18 months follow up.

## Impact

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People were able to leverage their relationships with their care providers to build stronger connections to their community.

## Social work and peer support

The social work and peer support team includes mental health clinicians who provide individual and group counselling; social workers who act as counsellors, guides, and advocates; a justice navigator who provides legal information to youth and adults; peer support workers with “lived experience” who provide practical and emotional support; and volunteer accountants who provide a tax return service. These services support individual and family functioning, personal stability, housing access and stability, and access to income through employment and benefits.

## Output

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**785**

people received social work and peer support.

## Outcome

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**42%**

of a sample of adult clients describing their financial situation as “terrible” to “poor” reported improvements at six to 18 months follow-up.

## Impact

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People living with no stable source of income or on very low income—often less than half of a “poverty line” income—obtained a stable source of income or increased income.



# Improved social support

## Community Food Centre and Social Dispatch: Emergency Pandemic Response

In non-pandemic times, The Alex Community Food Centre (CFC) is a welcoming place for people to come together to grow, cook, share, engage in advocacy projects, and forge new friendships. Programs at the main Alex site and the Seniors Health Centre also foster social connections through meals and activities. During the first six months of the pandemic, however, the CFC joined forces with the youth and adult social teams to deliver emergency food, necessities, counselling, and help with accessing benefits to both Alex clients and other community members. Meals were prepared at the CFC and hampers delivered to the door to individuals and families, including the new moms in our pre-/post-natal program and to seniors who were unable to leave their apartments. Phone calls and a listening ear also kept clients and community members on track in tumultuous times.

### Output

**39,421**

meals prepared and distributed.

\$102,000 in grocery cards distributed.

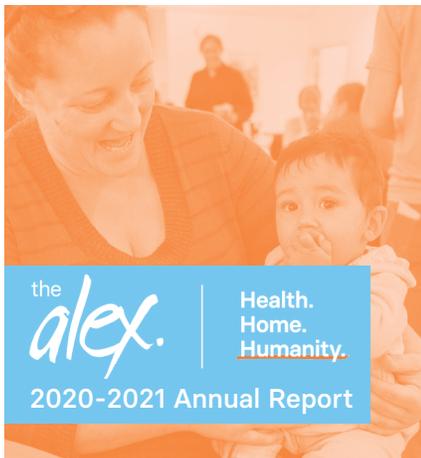
\$17,124 worth of produce sold at the Affordable Produce Market.

833 counselling and support sessions provided.

539 supports to obtain benefits/emergency benefits.

### Impact

The Alex's emergency pandemic response prevented individuals and families from plummeting into extreme hardship, along with social isolation and its attendant problems.



## Annual Report 2020-2021

Read our narrative report at  
[thealex.ca/our-impact](https://thealex.ca/our-impact)