

CITY OF MEDICINE HAT MUNICIPAL SOCIAL POLICY STATEMENT

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



SEPTEMBER, 2004

HISTORY

In 2000 the SDAB (FCSS) board began to explore the development of a City of Medicine Hat Social Policy. A public forum was held to provide an opportunity for citizens to discuss the aspects of a social policy including the components it should include. Representatives from City advisory boards, Palliser Health Region, staff, media and general public attended. A draft Social Policy was developed and forwarded to Public Services Committee for information. The draft paper was utilized in a subsequent Community Development strategy initiative.

The following is now a completed draft of a City of Medicine Hat Social Policy for consideration.

PREAMBLE

How does the City of Medicine Hat deal with social issues? This is the question addressed by a Social Policy. A Social Policy complements economic and environmental policy in guiding the municipal government in decision-making and program development directed towards enhancing the quality of life for all the citizens of Medicine Hat. By adopting a Social Policy the City of Medicine Hat confirms a commitment to ensure quality of life for all the citizens, being especially mindful of the needs of the most vulnerable. Whether in a leadership role, facilitation role, funding role, or services role, the strategies to meet the social needs of the community are solidly entrenched in policy and practice. By addressing social issues such as economic disparities and the diversity of the population of Medicine Hat, and by identifying vulnerable groups such as the poor, youth, seniors and people with special needs, the City's role in supporting the potential of all citizens is insured.

INTRODUCTION

Our vision is to make Medicine Hat the best place to live. To that end, we recognize that it is the collective responsibility of all citizens to build a strong community. Building community capacities results in economic growth and a safer and happier environment for all.

We also recognize that prevention is far less costly and empowers individuals to become positive, productive citizens.

Therefore, it is imperative the municipality play a significant leadership role in the development not only of a social policy framework but also in ensuring social policy affects the quality of life for all citizens.

Social policy provides guidelines for three primary purposes: developing and supporting a range of initiatives and programs; providing benefits to people; and strengthening communities.

The City of Medicine Hat has a long history of social policy planning and implementation. To honour that entrenched history of addressing social issues an articulated social policy is a natural progression. A social policy is intended to enhance social well-being and strengthen social cohesion. It also identifies the essential conditions and commitments necessary to maintain and/or develop a secure environment. City Council approves a variety of policies within the structure of the municipal corporation and should do so with these factors in mind.

The development and endorsement of a social policy is therefore logical. The social policy statement focuses on those principles, values and themes that have in the past shaped Council's decisions and signal the City's commitment to the future.

As we move into the new millennium the protection of the greatest resource, the citizens, is valued as a guiding principle for social policy.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Social Investment

The national trend toward greater disparity between rich and poor has not been eased by general economic growth nor by seeming regional prosperity.

The principle of social investment supports the notion that a healthy and productive Medicine Hat requires services and systems to help ensure all citizens have the economic and social means to care for themselves and to help their community. Social investment, therefore, is as equally important as economic investment.

Direct Services

The City of Medicine Hat recognizes that a continuum of direct services is needed to support all citizens.

This principle supports the well-being and self-sufficiency of citizens by fostering the availability of accessible and affordable services that support individuals and families experiencing challenging and difficult life circumstances. The social support continuum of programs and services should be broad and include, for example, services ranging from

information and referral through to school-age childcare, transportation, housing, and recreation services.

Basic Income, Food and Clothing Needs

Citizens must have their basic needs met in order to become full participants in society and to make valid contributions to our community. The City values the partnership of all levels of government; community groups and individual empowerment to ensure citizens have food, clothing and shelter.

The City therefore recognizes that basic needs must be met in order for individuals to reach their maximum potential and function fully.

Housing and Assisted Living

Within its distinct scope of jurisdiction, the City contributes to the supply of affordable and accessible social housing by supporting those with low incomes, disabilities and other social disadvantages.

This principle supports the role of the City in providing housing and land as well as the facilitation and the fostering of partnerships with community groups providing housing.

Employment

As an employer, the City supports an accessible and supportive work environment. As well, the City promotes employment and business opportunities within the community.

This principle means the City recognizes that individuals have a right to contribute to their community through meaningful and productive work.

Safety

The City strengthens social and community well being by striving to prevent violence and by increasing social cohesion through support for safe and secure environments for citizens.

This principle ensures the City recognizes that each individual is entitled to live in a safe community where persons and property are protected.

Transportation

The City supports and facilitates the development of an affordable, accessible and integrated transportation service for Hatters with disabilities related to ability and income, for the purposes of gaining employment, community and health services.

The City of Medicine Hat therefore recognizes that it is essential to have a public transportation system that allows and encourages all citizens, regardless of income and/or ability to fully participate in community life.

Community Input and Volunteerism

The City values and is committed to volunteer involvement by citizens. Volunteerism supports and contributes to the social development of individuals and families through local organizations and through a community-based network of social services. Furthermore, the City recognizes that in order to best serve its citizens, mechanisms must exist that allow for meaningful citizen input.

As such, the City supports opportunities that involve meaningful citizen participation and recognizes citizens must have a voice.

Community Development

The City recognizes that productive Community Development builds the capacity of community by determining priorities and creating local, community-based solutions.

To that end the City recognizes that a continued focus on doing “with” people rather than doing “for” people is critical.

Inclusion

The City values the human dignity and worth of all citizens. It recognizes the importance of respecting both our city's diversity and community integration.

The City supports the principle of inclusion and honours the contribution of all its citizens regardless of race, creed, religion, gender, sexual orientation, cultural background, age, physical or mental abilities, family status or socio-economic status.

Information and Access

People are empowered through knowledge and information. The City values the role that referral and information plays in ensuring citizens become connected in their community.

The City of Medicine Hat recognizes the importance of a coordinated information service.

Support for Citizens

The City recognizes the role of municipal government in ensuring support for all citizens.

Therefore, the City recognizes the importance of developing and maintaining programs targeted toward the youth population that will develop capacities and opportunities for and by youth. The City of Medicine Hat also recognizes the specific needs of the senior population, as well as, the family as the primary social support system for individuals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that the City of Medicine Hat consider social investment in all decisions and policies.
2. It is recommended that the City of Medicine Hat provide leadership, funding and advocacy in support of affordability, availability and quality of services.
3. It is further recommended that the City of Medicine Hat advocate with the provincial and federal governments to fulfill their responsibility for a publicly funded, fair and affordable social security system.
4. It is recommended that the City of Medicine Hat facilitate meetings between community social agencies and the business sector to share information and improve understandings of each other's role in the community.
5. It is recommended that the City encourage affordable housing through a variety of strategies including policies, lot sizes and resources.
6. It is further recommended that the City of Medicine Hat play a leadership role in conjunction with the private and community sector in the development of affordable, accessible and suitable housing.

7. It is recommended that the City of Medicine Hat work collaboratively and cooperatively to encourage internal City departments, community and private industry partners, and other levels of government to provide employment initiatives and training opportunities.
8. It is recommended that the City of Medicine Hat provide adequate police protection and encourage Medicine Hat Police Services to work with communities on crime prevention initiatives.
9. It is recommended that the City of Medicine Hat endeavour to ensure that all citizens have access to a variety of cultural and recreational services and activities.
10. It is recommended that the City of Medicine Hat provide public transportation services that are affordable, accessible and efficient.
11. It is recommended that the City of Medicine Hat make constituents aware of social issues and available services by collecting and disseminating information through a variety of methods.
12. It is recommended that the City of Medicine Hat encourage coordination and collaboration with internal departments of the City, community partners, and other levels of government in order to provide programs directed towards meeting the needs of youth.
13. It is recommended that the City of Medicine Hat encourage coordination and collaboration with internal departments of the City and with community organizations and other levels of government in order to provide programs and services directed towards meeting the needs of seniors.
14. It is recommended that the City of Medicine Hat, in conjunction with the Province of Alberta and community partners, ensure that services are available to families to address their needs.
15. It is recommended that the City of Medicine Hat build on the strengths of the community, supporting the community in identifying and addressing its needs and potential.
16. It is recommended that the City of Medicine Hat involve all groups of citizens in the decision making process, providing equal access to information and opportunities for input.
17. It is recommended that the City of Medicine Hat continue to recognize volunteers and citizens who significantly contribute to our community.
18. It is recommended that the City of Medicine Hat work collaboratively with community partners and government agencies to ensure that diversity is understood, respected and valued.

CONCLUSION

The obligation of a municipal government to its citizens is an issue of considerable debate. The social fabric of our community is inter-woven with many contributing factors.

Although it may be difficult to measure and gauge the impact of these various factors, the responsibility of the City of Medicine Hat to its most vulnerable citizens should be obvious. The political commitment and critical mass to make decisions to ensure the social well-being of all those residing in our community is critical.

This social policy ensures the strategies needed to meet the social needs of the community are solidly entrenched in both policy and practice. By addressing social issues such as economic disparities, cultural diversity and by identifying vulnerable groups such as the poor, youth seniors and person's with disabling conditions, the City of Medicine Hat's role in supporting the potential of citizens is both celebrated and ensured.