

# Alberta NDP election platform promises balanced budget by 2023<sup>[1]</sup>

Platform includes nearly \$3.2 billion in new initiatives

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online<sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

The Alberta NDP is promising to balance the budget by 2023 while rolling out billions of dollars in new funding for healthcare, education and childcare if it wins the upcoming election.

The party released its platform on Sunday, a day after the rival UCP unveiled its plan.

The plan relies in large part on an expected rise in government revenues and oilsands investments to pay for nearly \$3.2 billion in new initiatives over the next five years, including expanding child-care and cutting prescription drug costs for seniors.

The NDP is projecting deficits over the next four years — nearly \$8 billion in the first year and shrinking to around \$3 billion before it reaches a small surplus in 2023.

"The platform I'm releasing today builds on the work over the last four years," NDP Leader Rachel Notley said during the platform announcement in Edmonton.

The UCP's platform promises a surplus by 2022.

### 'Our job is far from done'

Notley called the UCP's plan "reckless and shortsighted" and slammed leader Jason Kenney's commitment to cut provincial corporate tax rates to the lowest in the country.

The most expensive commitment in the NDP's plan is a promise to roll out \$25 a day child-care across the province and create 13,000 new child-care spaces. Expanding the program is expected to cost \$1.5 billion over the next five years, climbing to \$500 million in 2023 alone.

"Child-care is the medicare of this century," Notley said. "This is about providing equality and access to a good, healthy start."

The party expects the child-care plan to add as much as \$6 billion to the GDP each year through workforce participation, but those projections aren't included in the platform.

An NDP government would look to slash emergency room wait times in the province, the platform says. A \$90-million annual commitment also seeks to cut delays for cataract, heart and cancer surgeries.

Seniors making less than \$75,000 a year wouldn't pay for prescription drug co-payments under the NDP plan. The party expects it will save seniors \$200 a year. The annual cost to government would be \$110 million.

Edmonton and Calgary would each get a storefront mental health clinic to provide immediate care to people in crisis under the NDP plan. The party is also pledging to launch a lawsuit against the manufacturers of opioid medication to recoup the costs of the opioid crisis.

The plan sets aside \$50 million over the next five years to expand reproductive health services to women living in rural Alberta.

### Oilsands investment, royalties boost

Aside from the new commitments, the NDP is pledging to keep funding for government services in line with population growth.

The platform doesn't include any new taxes.

The NDP plans to pay for the new initiatives in part with rising government revenues over the next five years. A recent government fiscal update shows oil revenues more than doubling to \$12.3 billion by 2023, when 10 oilsands projects are expected to pay higher royalties.

Notley said the party's first commitment is to "supercharge" investments in Alberta's oilsands. She said the party would attract \$75 billion in new investments to fund major expansions to refining and upgrading, creating 70,000 jobs over the next 10 years.

"From the start I've fought hard to build pipelines," Notley said, while vowing to see the stalled Trans Mountain pipeline expansion project get built.

"We've been working strategically to build a national consensus with determination and commitment."

Notley said the UCP's proposal to turf a plan to ship oil by rail turned its back on Alberta's energy industry.

But UCP candidate Jason Nixon fired back later Sunday afternoon, saying the NDP's commitment to balance the budget had "zero credibility" and spending would only add to a projected rise in Alberta's public debt.

"We can't continue to spend at this rate. There's not an Albertan that I've spoken to that thinks we should continue on the track to \$100 billion in debt," Nixon said. "The UCP has put forward clear plans on how we can hold the line and protect our services but then also get control of our fiscal situation."

Notley's plan also commits to targets outlined in the NDP's Climate Leadership Plan, including reducing methane emissions by 45 per cent by 2025 and phasing out coal generation by 2030. The platform mentions climate change twice, once to accuse the UCP of "climate change denial," and again to express continued support for the climate plan — a plan the UCP has vowed to scrap.

Since the plan was implemented, the NDP said Alberta's greenhouse gas emissions have dropped by 16 percent.

The NDP is also promising new education investments in its platform, including cutting tuition fees for high school upgrading and for English language classes.

The plan earmarks \$23 million for a permanent classroom improvement fund, while also vowing to build or modernize 70 schools across the province.

An NDP government would also ban conversion therapy to align with the recommendations of a working group established earlier this year that's looking at ways to end the practice.

Conversion therapy is the widely discredited practice of trying to change people's sexual orientation, gender identity or expression through counseling or religious practices.

Notley said an NDP government would continue working with First Nations in the province to fast track clean drinking water infrastructure on reserves. The platform also includes \$5 million over the next five years for Native Friendship Centres to expand support for Indigenous people living off-reserve.

Advance polls open a week ahead of the April 16 election.

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