



DOGS WITH WINGS
ASSISTANCE DOG SOCIETY

Bridging the Gap: Alberta's Need for Accredited Assistance Dogs

The case for Dogs With Wings, in the numbers



October 2026 · Prepared by Greg Loveday, Chief Executive Officer

11343 174 Street NW, Edmonton, AB T5S 0B7 · 780-944-8011 · DogsWithWings.ca · CRN 88867 7234 RR0001

Why Alberta needs Dogs With Wings

Every year, tens of thousands of Albertans face the hardest moments of their lives: a wheelchair user unable to live independently, a child disclosing abuse, a mother fleeing violence, a young patient facing surgery, a dispatcher taking a call no one should hear. Dogs With Wings Assistance Dog Society has spent more than 30 years breeding, raising, training and placing assistance dogs to stand beside them.

The numbers below show the scale of that need. Each figure is sourced and dated; where Alberta does not publish a province-wide count, we say so and give the best available measure.

Need in Alberta	Latest figure	Year
Mobility		
1. Albertans aged 15+ with a disability	1.2 million+	2025
2. Albertans who use a wheelchair or scooter (estimate)	~44,000	current
PTSD / Trauma		
1. Albertans living with PTSD at any given time (estimate)	~100,000	current
2. Albertans who will experience PTSD in their lifetime (estimate)	~400,000	lifetime
3. 911 calls made in Alberta (province-wide)	1.67 million+	per year
Facility		
1. Children and youth reached yearly at DWW's four advocacy centres (AB & MB)	~10,500	per year
2. Children supported directly by DWW facility dogs (AB & MB)	1,900+	in one year
3. Children and youth helped by Alberta's child abuse support organizations	~9,700	per year
4. Children and youth receiving child intervention services	9,080	Dec 2023
5. Survivors and children admitted to domestic violence shelters	8,136	2023–24
6. People shelters could not accommodate	31,248	2023–24
7. Surgeries at the Stollery and Alberta Children's Hospital	22,000+	per year
8. Pediatric emergency visits at Alberta's two children's hospitals	~130,000	per year
Companion		
1. Canadian children and youth (1–17) diagnosed with autism	1 in 50	2019
2. Young Albertans (0–25) identified with autism in provincial records	8,132	2005–2011

A single DWW dog can positively influence thousands of people over its working life, in hospitals, schools, courthouses and crisis response settings.

A note on the numbers

It is very difficult to find accurate numbers, and that is part of the problem. Alberta has no single count of children who experience abuse, people living with PTSD, Albertans who use wheelchairs, or children who testify in court. Organizations publish figures in different years and measure different things: one counts children, another counts cases, another counts visits. Some publish nothing at all.

The need continues to grow faster than measurement can keep up. Shelters are turning away record numbers of people, advocacy centres report their busiest years, and 911 centres answer more calls every year, while the data describing those trends is often years old. Where an exact count does not exist, this document uses the best available figure or a clearly labelled estimate. Every figure here should be read as a floor, not a ceiling.

Proactive care is critical: support that reaches people early can stop a crisis before it deepens. But reactive care, the support Dogs With Wings provides after harm has already happened, is part of the overall picture too. A child giving testimony, a survivor rebuilding after violence, a patient facing surgery, a person living with trauma: these moments cannot wait for better data.

What's clear is this: Albertans need Dogs With Wings.

1. Mobility: Albertans who use wheelchairs and mobility aids

More than 1.2 million Albertans aged 15 and over live with one or more disabilities, and an estimated 44,000 use a wheelchair or scooter for daily mobility.

- **Disability in Alberta:** 27.5% of Albertans aged 15+ had a disability in 2022, up 5.8 percentage points from 2017. That is over 1.2 million people.
- **Mobility disability:** Nationally, 10.6% of Canadians aged 15+, more than 3.1 million people, have a mobility disability; the rate reaches 25.5% among seniors.
- **Unmet need:** 75% of Canadians with a mobility disability who needed therapy services had an unmet need.
- **Wheelchair and scooter users:** About 288,800 Canadians aged 15+, 1.0% of the community-dwelling population, use a wheelchair or scooter: 197,560 manual wheelchair users, 42,360 power wheelchair users and 108,550 scooter users.

Alberta does not publish its own count of wheelchair users. Applying the national 1.0% rate to Alberta's population aged 15+ (implied by 1.2 million people at a 27.5% disability rate) gives an estimate of roughly 44,000 Albertans. Because that national rate dates from 2012 and use rises with age, the true figure today is likely higher.

A DWW service dog retrieves dropped items, opens doors, and helps with tasks that would otherwise need another person, giving independence back one day at a time.

2. PTSD / Trauma: living with PTSD

PTSD can affect anyone who lives through trauma: survivors of abuse, assault and domestic violence, children who have been hurt, people in serious accidents or disasters, and anyone who witnesses violence. About 9 in every 100 Canadians will experience PTSD in their lifetime. Alberta does not publish a count of PTSD diagnoses, so the figures below are the best available.

Alberta estimate: Applying Canada's PTSD rates to Alberta's roughly 4.36 million people aged 15 and over (implied by 1.2 million people at a 27.5% disability rate) gives about 100,000 Albertans living with PTSD at any given time (2.4%) and about 400,000 who will experience it in their lifetime (9.2%). These are estimates; Alberta does not publish a count of PTSD diagnoses.

- **Trauma is common:** 76.1% of Canadians report exposure to at least one traumatic event. Lifetime PTSD prevalence in Canada is 9.2%, with 2.4% living with it in any given month.
- **Survivors of violence and abuse:** In 2023–24, Alberta's domestic violence shelters admitted 8,136 survivors and their children, and Alberta's child abuse support organizations help about 9,700 children and youth every year.
- **Disaster:** One year after the 2020 Fort McMurray flood, 39.6% of surveyed residents showed likely PTSD.

- **People who help others:** 33% of workers in Alberta's homeless-serving sector show PTSD symptoms, and 12% to 23% of first responders will experience PTSD at some point.

PTSD does not belong to one profession or one group. It affects survivors of abuse and assault, people recovering from accidents, families who have lived through disasters, and the professionals who respond. A DWW PTSD/Trauma service dog can interrupt nightmares and panic attacks, create space in crowds, and help any person living with trauma return to work, school and family life.

911 calls and the people who answer them

Albertans make more than 1.67 million 911 calls every year. Counting their emergency and non-emergency lines, the centres in Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, Lethbridge, Strathcona County and Medicine Hat answer more than 2.4 million calls a year, about 6,700 every day.

Centre	Calls per year	Year
Edmonton Police Service ECOMB	almost 1,000,000 (1.1 million in 2023)	2024
Calgary 9-1-1	more than 1,000,000	2025
Red Deer 911 Emergency Communications Centre	165,000	2025
Lethbridge Public Safety Communications Centre	upwards of 160,000	2023
Strathcona County Emergency Communications	87,932 (46,334 emergency + 41,598 non-emergency)	2025
Medicine Hat 911 Communications	25,659 (18,741 wireless + 6,918 landline)	2023
Six municipal centres combined	more than 2,400,000	latest available
Alberta RCMP Operational Communications Centres	666,334 calls for service	2025
Alberta Health Services EMS	more than 750,000 EMS events	2025

Municipal figures include emergency and non-emergency calls, except Medicine Hat's, which count 911 calls only. The RCMP and EMS rows are listed separately because many of those calls are transferred from the municipal centres, so adding them would double-count. Other centres do not publish annual totals.

Calgary's call volume rose 4% in 2025, and calls needing language support, which take three times longer to process, rose 10% between 2024 and 2025. Edmonton's 175 emergency communications officers are, in their superintendent's words, exposed to a lot of traumatic events.

Every one of these calls is a person facing a crisis, and many callers, victims and witnesses carry that trauma long after the call ends. The people who answer carry it too; DWW wellness dogs in dispatch centres give them a moment to reset between calls.

3. Facility: where DWW dogs are placed

DWW facility dogs work inside five of Western Canada's busiest child-serving facilities. Together these partners reach about 10,500 children and youth through their advocacy centres and handle more than 324,000 hospital patient visits every year. DWW dogs themselves directly comforted more than 1,900 children in a single year at the three partners that report it.

Partner	DWW dogs	Children and youth reached by the partner per year	Children supported directly by DWW dogs
Zebra Child and Youth Advocacy Centre, Edmonton	DWW Captain, DWW Triggs; earlier DWW Wren and DWW Fletcher	4,000+	600+ in one year
Luna Child and Youth Advocacy Centre, Calgary	DWW Webster and DWW Axel (placed 2017)	~4,700 abuse cases assessed (2024–25)	not published
Toba Centre for Children and Youth, Winnipeg	DWW Booster, DWW Duke, DWW Jelly	1,271 (2024–25)	300+ (2024–25)
Central Alberta Child Advocacy Centre, Red Deer	DWW partner centre	~500 case files (2023–24)	not published
Advocacy centre subtotal		~10,500	900+
Stollery Children's Hospital, Edmonton	DWW Pumbaa, Canada's first ADI-accredited facility dog with a Child Life team (June 2025)	324,425 patient visits (fiscal 2023)	1,000+ patients in his first year
All five partners	10 DWW dogs placed	~10,500 children at advocacy centres, plus 324,000+ hospital visits	1,900+ in one year

The advocacy centre counts mix children and cases, and hospital visits count repeat visits, so the two are kept separate rather than added into one number. Luna and the Central Alberta CAC do not publish how many children their DWW dogs see, so the 1,900+ is a floor.

Toba Centre is Manitoba's only child advocacy centre and DWW's first Manitoba partner. Of the children it saw in 2024–25, 52% were aged 6 to 12, 71% were female and 62% were Indigenous, and they came from every region of the province.

Toba's executive director has described a child who could not open up to investigators, then began disclosing to the dog once left alone with it; the interview was recorded and her account captured.

Children who experience abuse

Alberta reports child abuse at higher rates than the national average, and most of it never reaches police. Alberta has no single annual count of child abuse victims, so the picture comes from several systems at once:

- **Lifetime experience:** 67.5% of Albertans report some form of maltreatment before age 15, the second-highest rate among provinces (national rate 59.7%).
- **Child intervention:** 9,080 children and youth were receiving child intervention services in December 2023; 72% were Indigenous.
- **Police-reported family violence:** 2,781 Alberta children and youth were victims of police-reported family violence in 2019, plus 5,591 victims of non-family violence, 8,372 in total.
- **Sexual violence:** In 2023, 21% of female child and youth victims of police-reported violent crime in Alberta were victims of sexual assault and 19% of sexual violations against children.
- **Online exploitation:** ALERT's internet child exploitation unit received 5,177 intakes in 2024, up 35% from 3,813 in 2023.

The Silent Cries report from Red Deer Polytechnic and the Central Alberta Child Advocacy Centre found Lethbridge, Edmonton and Red Deer have especially concerning rates of police-reported violence against children.

Child advocacy centres and testifying in court

Alberta's child abuse support organizations help nearly 10,000 children and youth under 18 every year. Alberta has nine child and youth advocacy centres, where police, child services, prosecutors and health staff work under one roof so a child tells their story once, plus specialized treatment programs such as Little Warriors' Be Brave Ranch.

Organization	Location	Children and youth per year	What the figure counts	Year
Luna Child and Youth Advocacy Centre	Calgary	~4,700	abuse cases assessed	2024–25
Zebra Child and Youth Advocacy Centre	Edmonton	4,000+	children and youth supported	annual
Central Alberta Child Advocacy Centre	Red Deer	~500	case files (460+ forensic interviews)	2023–24
Little Warriors / Be Brave Ranch	Edmonton area	261	children and youth served, all programs	fiscal 2025
Chinook Child and Youth Advocacy Centre	Lethbridge	~200	yearly average of 604 over three years	2022–2025
Total	Alberta	~9,700	children and youth, latest available year	

The total is a conservative floor, because several centres report older or partial years. Luna's figure counts cases, so a small number of children may be counted more than once.

Rising caseloads led the province to raise funding for these centres by 10%, to \$3.7 million in 2025.

When a child must testify

Alberta does not publish a province-wide count of how often people under 18 testify in court. The best measures come from the advocacy centres that prepare and accompany them:

- Court cases involving Zebra Centre children rose from 112 to 290 over ten years; since 2012 the centre has delivered child-focused court preparation more than 518 times.
- Zebra's facility dogs supported more than 600 children in one year, with a waitlist because of demand; one dog is in court at least three times a week.
- Luna CYAC offers remote testimony from its centre so children can give evidence without entering a courtroom.

DWW dogs have been part of this work from the start. DWW Wren was the first facility dog to support a child on the stand at the Edmonton Law Courts, and met with children, youth and families 265 times in 2019 alone. DWW also trained Fletcher, Captain and Triggs for the Zebra Centre.

Women and children in Alberta's shelters

In 2023–24, Alberta's domestic violence shelters admitted 8,136 survivors and their children, and could not shelter 31,248 more, the highest number ever recorded. For every person who stayed, four more needed a bed and could not get one.

Measure, 2023–24	Adults	Children
Admitted to emergency shelters	4,372	3,167
Admitted to second-stage shelters	192	336
Admitted to elder abuse shelters	69	—
Served through outreach	5,069	1,435
Could not be sheltered	18,868	12,380

- Shelters answered 53,391 calls for help, about one call for every 100 Albertans.
- Children made up 43% of everyone admitted to shelters.
- The 12,380 children who could not be sheltered is a ten-year high, up 20% in one year.
- 30% of shelters have cut programs since April 2023, including play therapy and respite childcare.

The ACWS report notes that shelter services for children include therapeutic supports such as pet therapy. A calm, trained dog gives a frightened child something steady to hold onto in a place that is not yet home.

Children in Alberta's children's hospitals

Alberta's two children's hospitals together perform more than 22,000 surgeries and see about 130,000 pediatric emergency visits a year. The Alberta Children's Hospital in Calgary alone serves about 100,000 children and families every year.

Measure	Stollery Children's Hospital (Edmonton)	Alberta Children's Hospital (Calgary)	Combined
Surgeries per year	12,000+	~10,000 (20% emergency)	22,000+
Emergency department visits per year	54,649 (fiscal 2023)	~75,000	~130,000
Patients served per year	324,425 patient visits (fiscal 2023)	~100,000 children and families	—
Surgery clinic visits	24,507 (fiscal 2023)	—	—
Beds	second-largest children's hospital in Canada by bed count	150	—

The Stollery serves the largest geographic area of any children's hospital in North America, and close to 40% of its inpatients come from outside Edmonton, often far from home and family. During respiratory surges, the Alberta Children's Hospital emergency department has seen more than 300 visits a day against a normal 180 to 220, with waits of 15 hours or more.

For a child facing surgery, a long wait or a hospital stay far from home, a trained facility dog lowers fear and gives families a moment of normal.

4. Companion: support for autistic children and their families

Autism is part of DWW's Companion Dog program, and the need is large: 1 in 50 Canadian children and youth aged 1 to 17, or 2.0%, have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Autism is the most common neurodevelopmental condition in Canada.

Autism measure	Figure	Source and year
Canadian children and youth (1–17) diagnosed with autism	1 in 50 (2.0%)	PHAC, 2019 CHSCY
Boys diagnosed compared with girls	about 4 times as often	PHAC, 2019 CHSCY
Diagnosed before age 5	53.7%	PHAC, 2019 CHSCY
Young Albertans (0–25) identified with autism in provincial records	8,132	PolicyWise, 2005/06–2010/11
School-age children in the Calgary region with an autism diagnosis	1,711 (1 in 94)	U of C School of Public Policy, 2012/13
Calgary-region elementary students (grades 1–6) with a diagnosis	1 in 86	U of C School of Public Policy
Calgary-region students with autism rated severe in a school setting	89%	INSAR 2015

Autism measure	Figure	Source and year
Young Albertans with autism meeting educational expectations	35% to 41%	PolicyWise

Alberta does not publish a current province-wide autism count; the Alberta figures above are the most recent provincial studies available, and diagnosis rates have risen since they were collected.

- Only 39.0% of autistic children and youth were reported to have optimal mental health, and 68.7% had another long-term condition such as ADHD, a learning disability or an anxiety disorder.
- A University of Lincoln study found that families of autistic children who got a dog saw parenting stress keep falling over two and a half years, while families without a dog did not. Dog-owning families also reported better family functioning and fewer difficult parent-child interactions.

A well-trained DWW companion dog brings that steadiness into the home, supporting the autistic child and easing the load on the whole family.

5. Adoption: even as pets, our dogs change lives

Not every DWW dog becomes a working assistance dog, and those adopted into family homes still make a measurable difference. Research links dog ownership to longer life, lower stress and less loneliness.

- **Longer life:** A University of Toronto meta-analysis of 3,837,005 people, published in *Circulation* in 2019, found dog ownership associated with a 24% lower risk of death from any cause and a 31% lower risk of cardiovascular death.
- **Less loneliness:** A study in *BMC Public Health* found new dog owners felt less lonely within three months and met new people in their neighbourhood through their dog.
- **Heart health and stress:** Pet ownership is linked to lower blood pressure and cholesterol, better stress management, and better survival after a heart attack.

Every DWW dog receives the same careful breeding, raising and early training. Whether it goes on to a courtroom, a hospital or a family home, it carries that preparation with it.

Why our work is critical

The need in Alberta is growing faster than the systems built to meet it. Shelters turned away a record 31,248 people in one year. Advocacy centres report their busiest years yet. Children's hospitals and 911 centres answer more calls every year.

Behind each number is a person who needs steady, calm support at the hardest moment of their life. For more than 30 years, Dogs With Wings has provided that support through highly trained assistance dogs, placed with individuals and with the professionals who serve them.

Every contribution to Dogs With Wings helps breed, raise and train the next dog, and helps one more Albertan feel safe, heard and independent.

Empowering Individuals. Strengthening Communities.

Sources

Alberta does not publish province-wide counts for child court testimony, PTSD diagnoses or wheelchair users; the Alberta PTSD and wheelchair figures are labelled estimates derived from national rates. All sources were accessed in October 2026; each title links to the original source.

1. ACWS, Strength in Numbers: 2023–2024 Report on Domestic Violence Shelter Impact in Alberta
2. Government of Alberta, Child Intervention Information and Statistics, 2023–24 Q3
3. Statistics Canada, child and youth victims of police-reported violence by province, 2019
4. Justice Canada, Victims of police-reported violent crime in Alberta, 2023
5. rdnewsNOW, State of Child Wellbeing in Central Alberta report
6. Red Deer Polytechnic, 2025 Silent Cries report
7. CTV News, ALERT online child exploitation intakes
8. Government of Alberta release on child advocacy centre funding
9. City of Calgary, Child Abuse Prevention Month and Luna CYAC
10. Luna CYAC profile
11. rdnewsNOW, Central Alberta CAC busiest year
12. Lethbridge Herald, Chinook CYAC
13. ISPCAN 2016, Zebra Centre court preparation
14. CTV News, Zebra Centre facility dogs
15. CTV News, DWW Wren retires
16. CTV News, DWW Captain and Triggs
17. BLG, Luna CYAC remote testimony
18. Toba Centre for Children and Youth, Annual Report 2024–25
19. Toba Centre, Helping Hounds
20. Global News, Toba Centre facility dogs
21. Dogs With Wings, DWW Pumbaa: One Year at the Stollery
22. Dogs With Wings, Pawsitive Impact newsletter, June 2025
23. Global News, Dogs With Wings coverage (DWW Webster and DWW Axel)
24. Charity Intelligence, Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation
25. Graham, Stollery Children's Hospital facts
26. On-Site Magazine, new Stollery planning
27. ACH Pediatric Clinical Care Guidelines, About ACH
28. CBC News, Alberta Children's Hospital surgeries
29. CBC News, Alberta Children's Hospital emergency volumes
30. Global News, ACH wait times
31. Edmonton Police Service, ECOMB graduation 2025
32. Edmonton Police Service, Telecommunicators Week 2024
33. Edmonton ECOMB 2023 call volume
34. City of Calgary, Calgary 9-1-1 NPSTW 2026
35. Global News, Calgary 911 call volume
36. rdnewsNOW, Alberta RCMP 911 calls
37. Van Ameringen et al., Post-traumatic stress disorder in Canada
38. Edmonton Journal, PTSD research funding
39. Safety Mag, Alberta first responders and PTSD
40. Athabasca University, PTSD in frontline shelter workers
41. European Psychiatry, PTSD in Fort McMurray after the flood
42. Statistics Canada, New data on disability in Canada, 2022
43. Statistics Canada, Mobility disabilities, 2022
44. ATB Financial, Albertans with disabilities
45. Smith et al., Prevalence of wheelchair and scooter use in Canada
46. Kramer et al., Dog Ownership and Survival: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis, Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes, 2019
47. Powell et al., Companion dog acquisition and mental well-being, BMC Public Health, 2019
48. Merck Veterinary Manual, the human-animal bond
49. Public Health Agency of Canada, Autism spectrum disorder: 2019 CHSCY
50. Minister of Health, World Autism Awareness Day 2022
51. PolicyWise, A profile of young Albertans with autism spectrum disorder
52. University of Calgary School of Public Policy, 1 in 94 school-age children in Alberta have autism
53. INSAR 2015, Measuring local prevalence for autism spectrum disorder
54. AAHA, Pet dogs lower stress in families with autistic children
55. University of Lincoln, Dogs de-stress families with autistic children
56. rdnewsNOW, Red Deer 911 centre handled 165,000 calls in 2025
57. City of Lethbridge, Public Safety Communications Centre
58. City of Medicine Hat, 2023 Fire and Emergency Services Year in Review
59. Charity Intelligence, Little Warriors
60. Alberta Children's Hospital Foundation
61. Government of Alberta, Alberta 911 program
62. Strathcona County, National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week 2026
63. Alberta RCMP, Telecommunicators Week 2026
64. Alberta Health Services, Emergency Medical Services