



Creating a high performing work force: The importance of a wellbeing strategy

Insights from Alberta Blue Cross® to help you cultivate a culture of wellbeing in the workplace

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Making health and wellbeing a priority	2
Methods	3
About our data	3
Findings	5
Organizational wellbeing defined	5
The drivers of organizational wellbeing	7
Wellbeing as a competitive edge	8
The value on investment (VOI) of a cohesive wellbeing strategy	9
Key takeaways	11
Taking the next steps	12
Are you prepared for the future of work?	13
About Alberta Blue Cross	14

A message from our CEO

Over the past few years, there's been a seismic shift in how businesses need to adapt to new and emerging pressures.

As this shift occurs, investing in the wellbeing of employees has become a business imperative—essential to fostering a thriving organization and a high performing work force.

At Alberta Blue Cross, wellbeing is part of our DNA. We know that enabling environments that advance mental, physical and social wellbeing as well as collaboration and purpose lead to healthier, happier and more productive teams.

Despite good intentions, current workplace wellness strategies are failing due to a lack of integration and shared commitment—using a one-size-fits-all approach or ad hoc products and programming.

At Alberta Blue Cross, we believe the future of being well means doing things differently.

As you review this report, I encourage you to keep these two questions top of mind:

1 | How can having a cohesive wellbeing strategy impact your organization?

2 | What innovations can you consider to enhance your existing approach to promoting wellbeing?

I sincerely appreciate your interest in advancing the wellbeing of your employees, and I look forward to collaborating with you as together we champion wellbeing as a fundamental aspect of workplace culture.

Mark Komlenic
President and CEO, Alberta Blue Cross

INTRODUCTION

Making health and wellbeing a priority

What has been largely showcased since the COVID-19 pandemic is that employee wellbeing has become a crucial factor in organizational sustainability and performance.



Wellbeing as an essential business strategy

There's a significant gap in reliable data that goes beyond benefits and claims, and truly uncovers the real drivers of a healthy, high-performing workforce—especially in Alberta. This is why we've created this first of its kind, Alberta centric report: to capture critical employer perspectives on where and how they are prioritizing employee wellbeing. Understanding these insights is vital, not only for shaping strategies within our own organization, but for guiding the many others who rely on us for expertise in wellbeing and performance. With this report, we'll highlight how a cohesive wellbeing strategy is a business imperative.

There's no ambiguity in our findings as they underscore the need for organizations to strategically prioritize wellbeing. In an era where employees are expecting more from their employers, companies need to invest in comprehensive wellbeing strategies to see significant returns in terms of employee engagement, productivity and retention.



90% of the surveyed organizations reported employee wellbeing is extremely or very important to their organization's overall talent value proposition.

Yet only 50% of these organizations have a defined and cohesive wellbeing strategy.

METHODS

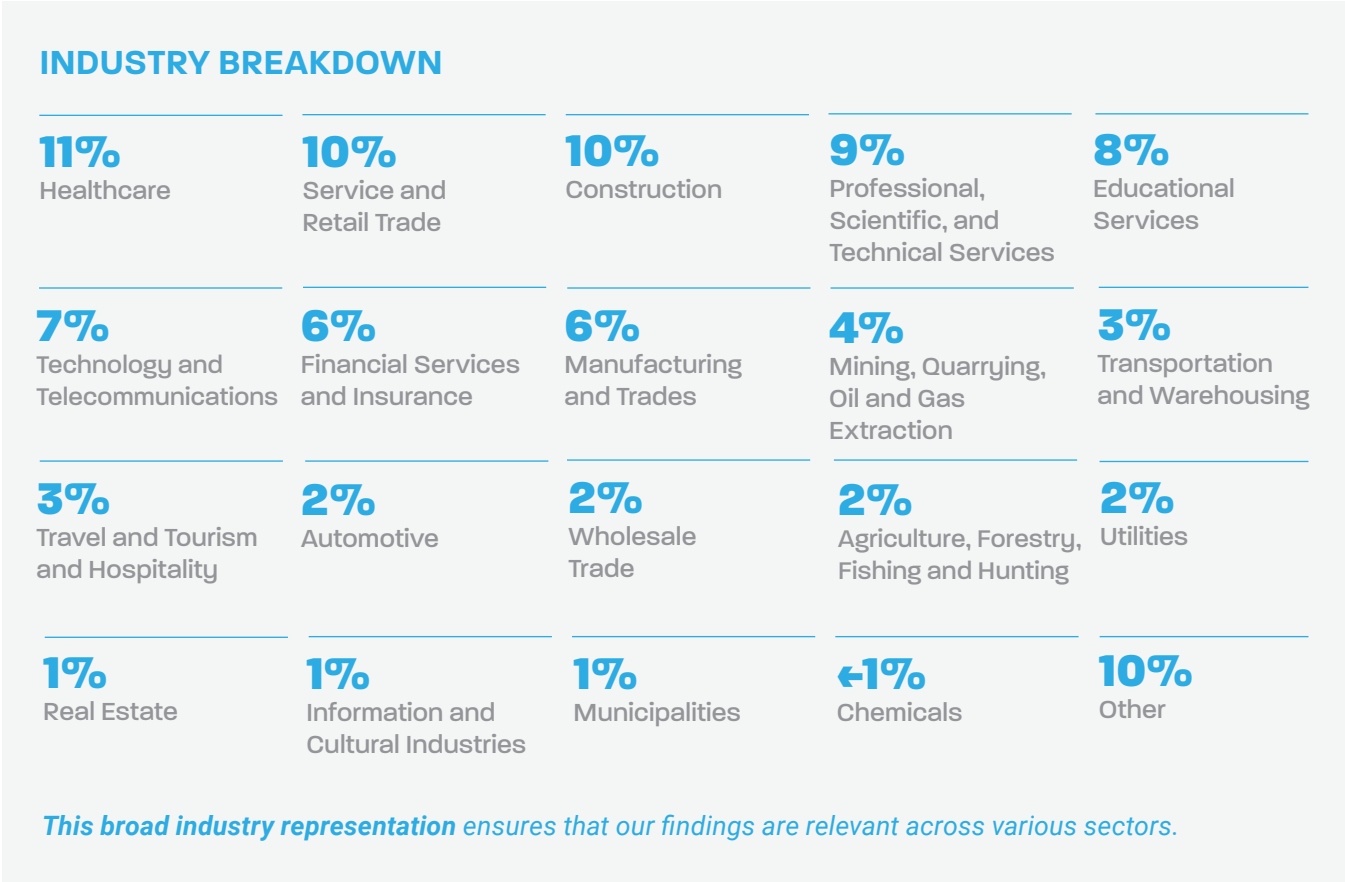
About our data



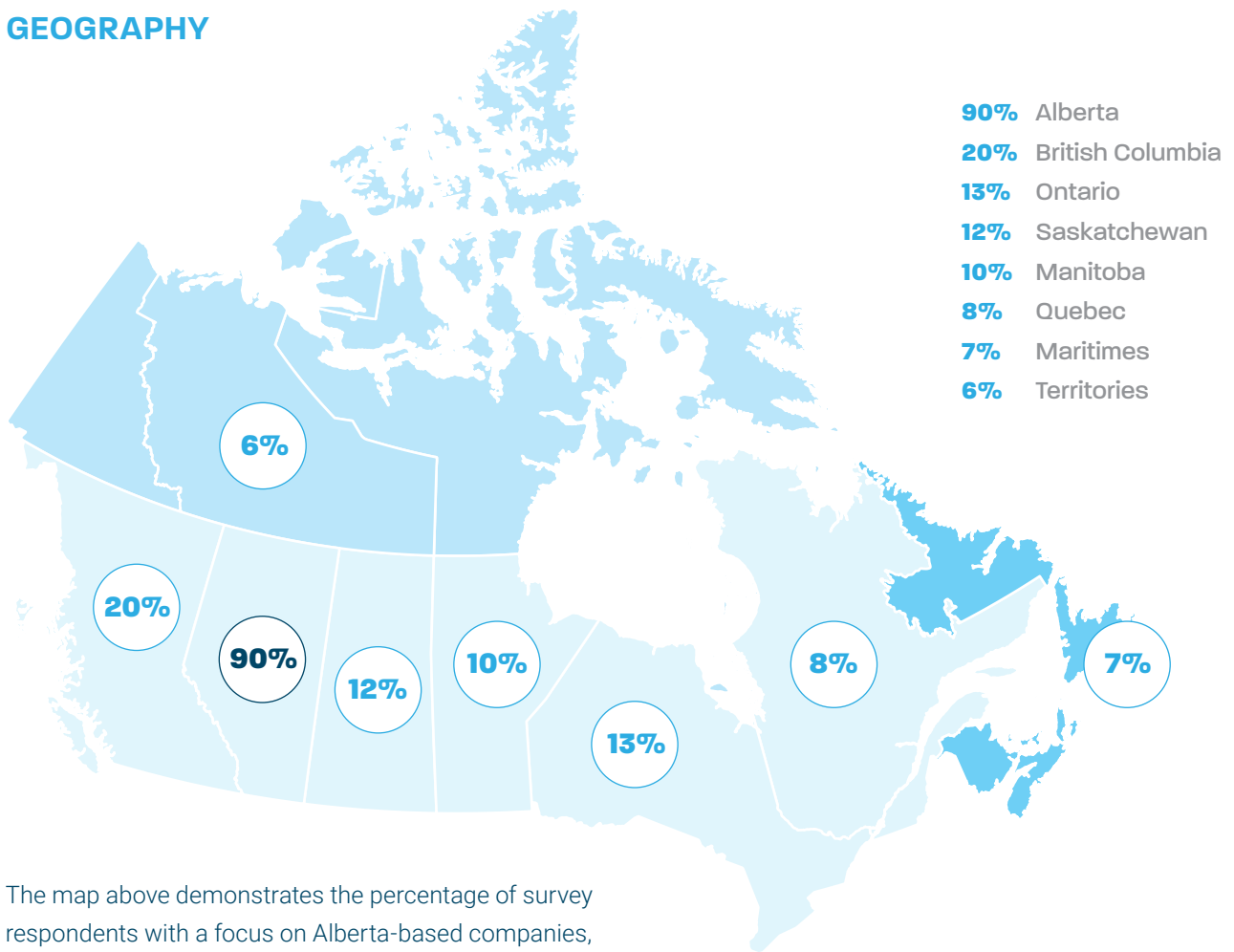
We gathered data and insights from 250 organizations across Canada spanning over 20 industries and four organization sizes, ranging from small businesses to enterprise corporations. To ensure that we’re providing a representative sample of the Alberta business landscape, 226 survey participants operate business in Alberta.

Over a 10-day period from April 15 to April 25, 2024, we collected insights that enabled us to capture the most up-to-date information on organizational wellbeing practices and leadership perspectives.

Key industries sampled



GEOGRAPHY



The map above demonstrates the percentage of survey respondents with a focus on Alberta-based companies, while representative across Canada.

We've categorized organizations into four size categories:

- 33%** Enterprise
(1,000+ employees)
- 20%** Large
(300-999 employees)
- 22%** Medium
(50-299 employees)
- 25%** Small
(<49 employees)



FINDINGS

Organizational wellbeing defined

We've heard from many Alberta Blue Cross clients that they're looking for personalized and actionable ways to support their employees' wellbeing. And while they understand the importance of supporting their employees, there's often a disconnect when it comes to integrating it into the overall culture.

What is individual wellbeing?

Defined as a **complex combination** of physical, mental, emotional and social factors that together influence an **individual's overall state of health**.

What is organizational wellbeing?

Defined as an organization's ability to **promote and maintain the physical, psychological and social wellbeing** of all employees through **practices, policies, processes, relationships and connections** that create an environment where teams and individuals can thrive.

Our clients tell us...

- + A strategic approach to wellbeing drives momentum and action.
- + Having a valued partner makes it easier to achieve wellbeing goals and become a leading employer.
- + Specifically, burnout and mental health are both a priority and a challenge.

93%

of employees consider wellbeing as important as salary¹

87%

would consider leaving a company that doesn't prioritize wellbeing¹



Prioritizing the wellbeing of employees can have a significant impact on your business. But this moves beyond providing regular communication and benefits or perks.


1. Wellhub State of Work-Life Wellness Report 2024



The wellbeing of employees is all about their overall experience. That is, the ways in which companies keep employees engaged and empowered to show up every day.

This comes through in the practices, policies, processes and connections that create an environment where employees and teams can thrive. Looking beyond individual wellbeing to the organizational enablers

contributes to greater impact on the employee experience overall. Organizations that focus and invest in fostering an excellent employee experience see positive impacts on business, people and innovation outcomes.

 <p>BUSINESS OUTCOMES</p> <p>2.2x more likely to exceed financial targets</p> <p>2.7x more likely to satisfy customers</p>	 <p>PEOPLE OUTCOMES</p> <p>3.2x more likely to engage and retain employees</p> <p>2x more likely to be a great place to work</p> <p>10.8x more likely to have lower rates of absenteeism</p>	 <p>INNOVATION OUTCOMES</p> <p>1.9x more likely to innovate effectively</p> <p>10.8x more likely to adapt well to change</p>
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Adapted from "The Definitive Guide to Wellbeing: The Healthy Organization". - The Josh Bersin Company (2021)

While there are many factors that contribute to a healthy and well workforce, we've identified some key drivers to organizational wellbeing. These interconnected drivers are essential to creating a work environment that not

only supports employee wellbeing but recognizes it as a critical pillar of overall organizational performance and success. Together the drivers lay the groundwork for a high performing workplace.

The drivers of organizational wellbeing

Here is a look at how organizations with a cohesive strategy compare to those that don't.

 <p>Physical wellbeing</p>	<p>This driver isn't just about the absence of physical illness. It focuses on the ways organizations prioritize and promote healthy lifestyles through policies, programs and resources that create work environments that support physical health.</p>	<p>Nearly 2x as likely to say their work spaces highly supports the wellbeing of employees</p>
 <p>Mental wellbeing</p>	<p>Mental wellbeing involves creating a supportive work environment, providing access to mental health resources, promotion of a psychologically safe environment and reducing workplace stress.</p>	<p>8x as likely to highly support mental health promotion through policies and programs</p>
 <p>Fostering purpose</p>	<p>Fostering purpose involves aligning individual roles with organizational goals and providing opportunities for personal and professional growth. This driver is key to creating a work environment where all employees feel valued and respected. Employees who find meaning and purpose in their work are more engaged and productive.</p>	<p>4x as likely to highly support career progression</p>
 <p>Fostering Collaboration</p>	<p>Creating a sense of belonging involves fostering an inclusive work environment that promotes collaboration. This driver is crucial for employee retention and engagement.</p>	<p>Nearly 5x as likely to have a more comprehensive approach to diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility</p>
 <p>Leadership buy-in</p>	<p>Leadership support is the foundation of success of any wellbeing initiative as it demonstrates support and appreciation for their teams and people. When leaders prioritize and model wellbeing, it sets the tone for the entire organization. Our research shows that organizations with a cohesive wellbeing strategy are more likely to say leaders' roles, responsibilities and incentive structures are highly supportive of promoting employee wellbeing.</p>	<p>8x as likely to highly support rewards and recognition programs and policies</p>

Wellbeing as a competitive edge

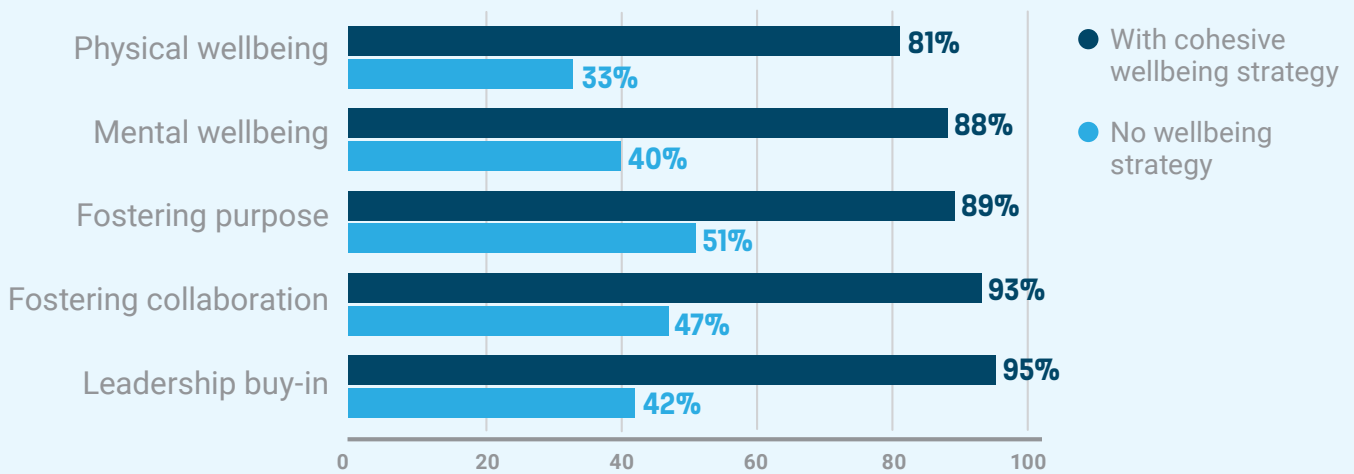
Creating a culture of wellbeing is the right thing to do for your employees.

Our findings suggest of the businesses who strategically prioritize wellbeing are also leading the pack in proactive implementation of organizational wellbeing drivers. What's compelling is that the focus on investment has shifted

from cost containment or return on investments to broader strategic outcomes such as organizational resilience, productivity, talent attraction and retention, business performance, and engagement.

These businesses aren't just doing right by their employees, they are outperforming their peers across the board.

RECOGNIZED DRIVERS OF ORGANIZATIONAL WELLNESS



This chart reflects total average percent of respondents who were highly supportive or supportive of the drivers of organizational wellness. Results are displayed by those who reported a cohesive wellbeing strategy and those who reported no wellbeing strategy.

These organizational wellbeing champions demonstrate:

- + Stronger support for mental health promotion
- + Higher trust in leadership decisions supporting employee wellbeing
- + Better support for managers in promoting team wellbeing

The top four reasons high performers are investing in wellbeing:

86%
Employee productivity

65%
Business performance

72%
Talent attraction and retention

65%
Fostering engagement



The value on investment (VOI) of a cohesive wellbeing strategy

It's clear that investing in a carefully crafted and well-designed wellbeing strategy sets the foundation for organizational strength. It's also key to enabling adaptability and success in a business environment that's constantly changing.

Organizations with a sound wellbeing strategy are more resilient. These organizations are better able to anticipate issues ahead, bouncing forward to cope and thrive during times of change. In doing so, these organizations support and create a workforce that's healthier, empowered, engaged and better equipped to navigate challenges.

Increased productivity, engagement and collaboration

When employees feel valued, they're more likely to be productive and engaged in their work. Overall, organizations that have a wellbeing strategy see higher employee performance, engagement, and retention.

Of the organizations with a cohesive wellbeing strategy that we surveyed:

61% report they are highly supportive of collaboration to improve the productivity and efficiency among employees

47% report they highly support and facilitate social experience where employees can strengthen relationships with others

49% report that nearly all employees use wellness programs

42% report they experience minor turnover

32% report they experience minor absenteeism

Organizational resiliency

Ultimately, organizations will achieve greater resiliency by:

- + Enabling wellbeing across the organization. This builds a healthier, more engaged workforce that can better adapt to challenges and disruptions, ensuring consistent performance during crises.
- + Prioritizing employee wellbeing to foster loyalty, reduce turnover and cultivate a positive workplace culture.
- + Balancing employee needs with business objectives, driving innovation, productivity and financial stability.



➡ **95%** of executive and managers agree that creating a better work environment is within the control of the company, yet only one third make it a priority.¹

Bridging the gap

In a study conducted by the job search engine Indeed, 87% of executives and managers said improving wellbeing in their workplace could give their companies a competitive advantage, but only one third made it a priority. Of those organizations that prioritize wellbeing, only 50% have a cohesive strategy in place.¹

Similarly, our own research found that 90% of the surveyed organizations reported employee wellbeing is extremely or very important to their organization's overall talent value proposition. Yet, of those, only 50% have a cohesive wellbeing strategy.

To address this gap, organizations must understand the importance of taking a strategic approach to wellbeing. It's not enough to simply offer benefits and a few wellness programs here and there. To truly realize success, organizations need to invest in a plan to create a culture of wellbeing that covers all aspects of the employee experience. While benefits may help attract top talent, the true goal is to cultivate a healthy, high performing workforce that drives the organization's business objectives. What's more, this plan needs to touch on every aspect of the employee experience.

1. https://d341ezm4iqaae0.cloudfront.net/assets/2020/07/28180029/HBRAS_Indeed_Research-Report-7.24.20.pdf



KEY TAKEAWAYS

While there are some organizations that understand the value of investing in wellbeing, there are others that aren't putting the policies and programs in place to support it. Of the 250 organizations we surveyed, those that lacked a wellbeing strategy are falling behind their peers that do. A quarter of those report their organization is "not very supportive" of the five key wellbeing drivers.

Leadership commitment plays a pivotal role in shaping organizational wellbeing, as it directly influences a company's culture. It's all in the data—organizations that have a defined and cohesive wellbeing strategy report significantly higher leadership support than those without. Less than 1% of companies with a cohesive wellbeing strategy face unsupportive leadership compared to 27% that are lacking a strategy. This stark contrast shows how vital a wellbeing strategy is for creating a culture that's focused on employee health.

Embracing organizational wellbeing as a strategic business imperative with employees at its core is going to be the key differentiator that will set your company apart. With 87% of



Making wellbeing a business priority and then developing a strategy to action it are two important initial steps to create meaningful change in your organization.

employees considering leaving companies that aren't prioritizing wellbeing, the time to act is now.² Investing in an environment where employees thrive is no longer optional—it's essential.

The ultimate outcome? Organizations that take this important step towards wellbeing will not only retain top talent but also unlock the full potential of their teams, driving meaningful and lasting value.

2. https://d341ezm4iqaae0.cloudfront.net/assets/2020/07/28180029/HBRAS_Indeed_Research-Report-7.24.20.pdf



Taking the next steps

So where do you go from here? Creating a successful wellbeing strategy requires a comprehensive approach that addresses all five drivers of organizational wellbeing. As you're looking to develop a wellbeing strategy for your organization, below are some key considerations:

1 | Assess the current state

Conduct a thorough assessment of your organization's current wellbeing initiatives and employee needs. This might involve employee surveys, focus groups, as well as an analysis of health and productivity data.

2 | Benchmark against industry

Comparing your organization's wellbeing initiatives and outcomes with industry benchmarks and best practices can offer valuable insights. To understand opportunities for greater investment, as well as compare your approach to competitors. This can create new opportunities for attraction and retention.

3 | Align programs to business goals

Ensure initiatives align with broader organizational objectives and reinforce how they contribute to the company's overall success.

4 | Set clear goals—and act on them

Goals should align with your overall business objectives and address the key areas of need identified in your current-state assessment. To learn about what other organizations found helpful or a barrier to this work, check out our [preliminary insights report](#).

5 | Empower leaders

Getting top-level engagement is key and will set the tone for the entire organization. This might involve educating leaders on the business case (e.g. increased productivity, higher employee retention, less downtime) and including wellbeing metrics in leadership performance evaluations.

Are you prepared for the future of work?

It's clear that organizations must recognize wellbeing as more than just an individual challenge or a one-off program. It's an ongoing journey that requires you to regularly assess your strategies, seek employee feedback and be willing to adapt as your organization's and your employee's needs evolve.



At Alberta Blue Cross, we help organizations identify, prioritize and address their unique organizational wellbeing challenges, supporting them by answering:

Is your leadership on board? How can you drive measurable results that inspire confidence in your stakeholders?

Do you have meaningful data? What's your data really telling you? How can you track progress and make better informed decisions?

Which opportunities matter most? What is the "story" behind the numbers? How can you focus on the right priorities without overspending?

How do you achieve more with less? What steps can you take to boost productivity and inspire your workforce?

Are you ready for challenges? Do you have the right strategy, structure, people and priorities? How can you sustain organizational resiliency and keep your team motivated and aligned with your values during uncertain times?



When you're ready, Alberta Blue Cross can help you move forward.

Our team of experts can provide strategic guidance and support along with a range of services to position your organization as a leader in workplace wellbeing.

Contact us at wellness@ab.bluecross.ca to learn more.



About Alberta Blue Cross

Alberta Blue Cross is the largest benefits provider in Alberta and one of the largest in Western Canada. We serve more than 1.8 million members with coverage through more than 5,000 small and large employer group plans, individual plans and government-sponsored programs. We believe we have the potential and responsibility to impact people's lives for the better. We believe all communities should thrive and we are committed to serving as a champion for wellness by promoting the health of Albertans.

Learn more at ab.bluecross.ca.



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