

EMBARGOED RELEASE
Mar. 20, 2024
2:15 PM

Finance 24-3439

BUDGET 2024-25: CLASSROOMS, CARE AND COMMUNITIES

Saskatchewan's 2024-25 Provincial Budget makes record new investments in classrooms, care and communities.

Deputy Premier and Finance Minister Donna Harpauer today tabled a budget that includes the largest-ever increase in school operating funding, the largest-ever increase in health funding and the largest-ever increase in municipal revenue sharing for Saskatchewan communities.

"Saskatchewan is growing at its fastest pace in more than a century and will reach 1.25 million people sometime this year," Harpauer said. "This budget addresses the challenges of a growing province by reinvesting the benefits of growth in the areas that matter most to Saskatchewan people - education, health and our communities."

In addition to more people, the labour market continues to grow, with more jobs and a low unemployment rate combining to help fuel the provincial economy.

"The 2024-25 Provincial Budget makes these important investments without introducing any new taxes or increasing existing ones," Harpauer said. "Our government continues to keep Saskatchewan an affordable place to live by delivering more than \$2.0 billion in previously announced tax reductions and other affordability measures, as well as by removing the federal carbon tax on home heating."

The \$19.9 billion revenue forecast for the 2024-25 Budget is up \$184.2 million from last year. The increase is primarily due to growth in all revenue categories, except non-renewable resources largely due to the moderation of potash prices.

Total expense is projected at \$20.1 billion in the 2024-25 Budget, an increase of \$1.5 billion, or 7.9 per cent, over last year's budget.

The 2024-25 Budget has a projected deficit of \$273.2 million, but is expected to return to a surplus position in 2025-26 due to increasing revenues driven by a growing population, labour force and economy.

One sign of Saskatchewan's strong financial position is its healthy and sustainable net debt, with the second lowest net debt-to-GDP ratio in Canada.

Supporting Education

The 2024-25 Budget supports students and teachers through a record investment of \$3.3 billion for the Ministry of Education, up 8.1 per cent over last year's budget. This is an increase of \$247.8 million to support Prekindergarten to Grade 12 students, early learning, child care and libraries.

Saskatchewan's 27 school divisions will receive \$2.2 billion in school operating funding for the 2024-25 school year - a record increase of \$180.0 million, or 8.8 per cent, over the previous year.

"We are investing in what teachers and students have told us matter the most," Harpauer said. "Overall, this budget provides \$356.6 million in classroom supports, which is up \$45.6 million over last year and is a significant commitment to address classroom size and complexity. This includes funding the Teacher Innovation and Support Fund Pilot and the Specialized Support Classrooms Pilot to help provide better student and teacher experiences."

The budget invests \$216.0 million for Prekindergarten to Grade 12 education capital projects, an increase of 41.8 per cent over last year. This includes ongoing funding for 11 projects and three major renovations currently underway across Saskatchewan, as well as funding for planning nine new schools and two renovations. Also included is \$28.5 million for relocatable classrooms, over and above the additional \$32.0 million announced for relocatable classrooms late in the 2023-24 fiscal year.

It includes \$793.0 million in funding for the post-secondary education sector, an increase of 3.7 per cent, to enrich the student experience and provide more opportunities for students to train and pursue careers in Saskatchewan.

Post-secondary students will benefit directly from \$46.5 million in financial supports, including a new grant to help reduce financial barriers to completing post-secondary education for low-income students with dependents.

The budget also includes continued support for skills training programs and services for unemployed or underemployed persons, including adult essential skills training, pre-employment programs and services, credentialled skills training programs through post-secondary institutions and employment for persons with disabilities.

Improving Health Care

"The 2024-25 Budget includes key investments to improve health care," Harpauer said. "A record \$7.6 billion investment through the Ministry of Health includes funding to expand patient care and increase access to services to meet the demands of our growing population."

The budget provides the Saskatchewan Health Authority with nearly \$4.7 billion, including an operating increase of \$248.3 million, or 5.6 per cent, compared to last year - another record investment in the 2024-25 Provincial Budget.

Of the record funding allocated to health care, \$71.4 million focuses on increasing the capacity of the acute care system. This includes \$30.0 million for the Saskatoon and Regina Capacity Pressures Action Plans, as well as an increase of nearly \$10.0 million for the Regina Urgent Care Centre. Funding is also being directed to continuing to reduce the surgical waitlist, working to achieve a three-month wait time target years ahead of schedule.

It also includes investments in the Health Human Resources Action Plan to hire, train and retain more health care professionals in the province. Additional funding in the budget provides credential recognition supports, including streamlined and accelerated assessments, training and licensure pathways and settlement programming for internationally trained health care workers.

A record budget of \$574.0 million will be invested into mental health and addiction programs and services, which represents more than seven per cent of health care spending. This includes an increase of \$34.0 million to expand access to targeted initiatives focused on children and youth, addictions and vulnerable populations across the province.

The Saskatchewan Cancer Agency will see an increase of \$26.1 million for a total record budget of \$248.9 million to ensure patients can access the most effective and cutting-edge treatment options. The budget includes investments to deliver timely, exceptional cancer care services for Saskatchewan women. A \$3.5 million increase for breast cancer care and screening includes technology enhancements and new diagnostic imaging equipment, as well as the establishment of a Breast Health Centre in Regina.

Targeted seniors' care initiatives will receive a \$43.4 million increase to stabilize services and programming so seniors can live safely and comfortably in their home communities for as long as possible.

To provide high-quality care, meet the needs of a growing province and ensure our health professionals have appropriate facilities to provide care to the people of Saskatchewan, the 2024-25 Provincial Budget invests a record \$516.8 million in health infrastructure, such as new hospitals and health care centres. This is an increase of \$179.3 million from the previous year and includes:

- \$180.0 million for the Prince Albert Victoria Hospital redevelopment project;
- \$55.0 million for the Weyburn General Hospital replacement project;
- \$27.0 million for construction of the La Ronge long-term care project;
- \$21.9 million to complete construction on the Regina General Hospital parkade; and
- \$20.0 million for Regina's long-term care specialized beds project.

Vibrant Communities

For cities, towns, villages and municipalities throughout Saskatchewan, this budget provides a record increase of \$42.4 million in municipal revenue sharing. This is an increase of 14.2 per cent from the previous year, for a total of \$340.2 million in unconditional support for municipalities in the province.

The budget provides \$29.5 million to support municipalities and industry partners in making investments in the provincial transportation system. These investments support economic growth and safety on rural and municipal roads.

There is \$719.4 million in this budget for the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety, which includes more than \$228.0 million to fund RCMP operations and \$21.6 million for the RCMP's First Nations Policing Program. It also includes \$7.0 million for the Saskatchewan Marshals Service in anticipation of beginning operations in 2026.

An investment of more than \$250.0 million will be provided to the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General to support the province's justice services and community wellbeing, including \$31.7 million for programs and services to reduce interpersonal violence.

The Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency will receive funding to renew its current air tanker fleet, which will approach the end of its useful life in 2027. The new fleet will provide wildfire support, as well as assistance with other emergencies and public safety events.

The 2024-25 Provincial Budget continues investment in First Nation and Métis communities throughout Saskatchewan. More than \$255.0 million in targeted funding will be provided for First Nation and Métis people and organizations, which is an increase of \$6.1 million over the previous year. This includes funding to help prevent violence and build safety for Indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirit people, as well as support First Nation and Métis communities in participating in the consultation process.

Families and Affordability

"This budget continues to deliver more than \$2.0 billion in affordability measures for Saskatchewan residents announced in previous budgets," Harpauer said. "Today, Saskatchewan is one of the most affordable places in Canada to live, work and raise a family."

Saskatchewan continues to maintain among the lowest personal taxes in the country. Since 2007, Personal Income Tax exemptions have removed more than 112,000 residents from the income tax role. Exemptions provide Saskatchewan people with over \$830.0 million in annual income tax savings.

"Affordability for Saskatchewan families remains a top priority in the 2024-25 Provincial Budget," Harpauer said. "This year families will continue to benefit from reduced education property tax and programs and services designed to make life more affordable, including the Active Families Benefit, Children's Drug Plan and programs to help fund insulin pumps and glucose monitors."

The 2024-25 Budget will also help low-income individuals, families and seniors provide for their basic needs. It includes a \$17.0 million investment to deliver the first full year of the Saskatchewan Employment Incentive Program to make life more affordable for working families with lower incomes.

"Saskatchewan homeowners will continue to receive additional relief this year due to our government's decision to stop collecting the carbon tax on natural gas and electric residential home heating," Harpauer said. "This is expected to save Saskatchewan homeowners \$400 per year on average."

There are additional supports for homeowners to help with affordability and improve housing availability, including the renewed PST Rebate on New Home Construction Program and the recently introduced Saskatchewan Secondary Suite Incentive Grant Program.

The 2024-25 Budget supports individuals, families and communities with a record budget of \$1.5 billion for the Ministry of Social Services. This is an increase of \$112.4 million, or 7.8 per cent, compared to last year.

The implementation of the Provincial Approach to Homelessness will continue, supported by an increase of \$16.7 million. This includes a \$7.2 million increase to support ongoing emergency shelter operations across the province, and a \$9.5 million capital investment to continue developing supportive housing spaces in Regina and Saskatoon.

The Saskatchewan Housing Corporation will invest \$83.4 million to repair and maintain provincially owned housing units, including an additional \$9.6 million in provincial funding to prevent and reduce vacancies and respond to the increasing demand for social housing.

This budget also supports people with disabilities and includes funding to support the changing needs of adults with intellectual disabilities, including support for residential and day programs, along with new group homes.

Monthly income assistance benefits will increase by three per cent for Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability and Saskatchewan Income Support clients.

For seniors, the Personal Care Home Benefit monthly income threshold will increase by \$100 to \$2,500 to help make living in a licensed care home more affordable.

Improved Infrastructure

The 2024-25 Budget invests \$741.0 million in safe and efficient transportation infrastructure to meet the growing needs of Saskatchewan's businesses, families and communities.

The Ministry of Highways budget provides \$417.3 million for transportation capital to improve more than 1,100 kilometres (km) of provincial highways, including 260 km of repaving, 765 km in light and medium pavement preservation, 58 km of Thin Membrane Surface improvements and 25 km of gravel rehabilitation.

"Road safety continues to be a priority for the Government of Saskatchewan, so this budget improves intersections, guardrails and lighting across the province by investing \$17.6 million into the Road Safety Improvement Program," Harpauer said. "This follows last year's completion of a five-year, \$100.0 million investment in road safety."

Other investments in provincial transportation infrastructure include \$73.5 million to build, operate and maintain the transportation system in northern Saskatchewan and \$59.3 million to repair or rebuild 17 bridges and replace more than 100 culverts.

Building a Strong Economy

"Our government recognizes the contributions small businesses make to our growing economy," Harpauer said. "For that reason, the small business tax rate reduction to a rate of one per cent is being extended until June 30, 2025. We will continue to have the second-lowest small business tax rate in Canada. The eligible business income threshold for small business tax will remain at \$600,000, which is the highest threshold in Canada."

Expanding into markets outside of Canada is an essential part of growing the Saskatchewan economy and leads to more jobs and more opportunities at home.

With a budget of \$40.6 million, the Ministry of Trade and Export Development will support the economy by continuing to expand Saskatchewan's presence in international markets and attracting investment into the province.

"In Saskatchewan, we're focused on growing our economy because it provides us with more opportunities to invest in things that truly matter to people, such as classrooms, care and communities," Harpauer said. "Ultimately, growth allows us to build a better quality of life for people and the communities in which we live."

The 2024-25 Budget includes \$53.8 million for the Ministry of Energy and Resources to support the province's growing economy, with a focus on Saskatchewan's world-class natural resources. The ministry's budget includes \$10.0 million in funding over 10 years for the Public Geoscience initiative, which will increase exploration to support the province's critical minerals strategy.

In recognition of the important role of critical minerals, the 2024-25 Budget includes funding for two new targeted incentives recently announced in the province's new Investment Attraction Strategy - the Saskatchewan Critical Mineral Innovation Incentive and the Critical Mineral Processing Investment Incentive.

To help ensure the permitting process for the exploration of Saskatchewan's natural resources is efficient and effective, the budget provides the Ministry of Environment funding for improvements.

To facilitate the development of previously inaccessible or uneconomic oil plays and attract increased oil well drilling to the province, the 2024-25 Budget introduces the Multi-lateral Well Program.

It also introduces the Clean Electricity Transition Grant and the Small Modular Reactor Investment Fund. Revenues from the electricity sector will be dedicated to priorities that support the province's clean electricity transition with a focus on reliability and affordability.

The 2024-25 Budget invests \$570.6 million in agriculture, an increase of \$22.4 million, or 4.1 per cent, from last year.

Recognizing the challenging weather and soil conditions some producers are facing, the ministry's budget provides \$431.7 million to fund federal-provincial risk management programs, including Crop Insurance and Agri-Stability.

The budget also provides \$89.4 million for strategic initiatives under the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership.

From across the world, people travel to Saskatchewan to enjoy the natural beauty of the province and experience the world-class hunting and fishing. To ensure visitors have a great experience, the 2024-25 Budget provides \$15.0 million for capital and infrastructure improvements at provincial parks in Saskatchewan.

"As we've demonstrated in the 2024-25 Budget, we will continue to invest in the areas that matter to the people of Saskatchewan - classrooms, care and communities," Harpauer said. "This budget delivers record funding into essential services and programs for residents, families and communities. Our government is committed to ensuring a strong economy and a bright future for Saskatchewan families."

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