The purpose of the Alberta Human Rights Act (the Act) is to provide Albertans with protection of their human rights. The Alberta Human Rights Commission administers the Act. The Act allows people to make a complaint to the Commission if they feel that they have experienced harassment or have been discriminated against in the specific areas and under the specific grounds protected under the Act. The aim of the Commission’s complaint resolution process is to return the complainant to the position he or she would have been in if the discrimination or harassment had not occurred.

Protected areas

The Act prohibits discrimination in the following areas:

- statements, publications, notices, signs, symbols, emblems or other representations that are published, issued or displayed before the public
- goods, services, accommodation or facilities customarily available to the public
- tenancy
- employment practices
- employment applications or advertisements
- membership in trade unions, employers’ organizations or occupational associations

Prohibitions regarding complaints

The Alberta Human Rights Act prohibits a person from retaliating against any person who has made a complaint, or given evidence about a complaint, or assisted another person in making a complaint under the Act. If a person believes someone has taken retaliatory action against them for any of these reasons, the person may make a complaint under the prohibitions section of the Act.

The Act does not allow a person to make a frivolous or vexatious complaint with malicious intent. Anyone who has reason to believe that such a complaint has been made against them may make a complaint under the prohibitions section of the Act.

Protected grounds

The Act provides protection from discrimination in the above areas under the following grounds. The descriptions below are not legal definitions. For more information about protected grounds, contact the Commission.

Race

Includes belonging to a group of people, usually of a common descent, who may share common physical characteristics, such as skin colour.

Religious beliefs

System of beliefs, worship and conduct (includes native spirituality).
Colour
Colour of a person’s skin. Discrimination based on colour may include, but is not limited to, racial slurs, jokes, stereotyping, and verbal and physical harassment.

Gender
The state of being male, female, transgender or two-spirited. The ground of gender also includes pregnancy and sexual harassment.

Gender identity
Refers to a person’s internal, individual experience of gender, which may not coincide with the sex assigned to them at birth. A person may have a sense of being a woman, a man, both, or neither. Gender identity is not the same as sexual orientation, which is also protected under the Act.

Gender expression
Refers to the varied ways in which a person expresses their gender, which can include a combination of dress, demeanour, social behaviour and other factors.

Physical disability
Any degree of physical disability, deformity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by injury, birth defect or illness. This includes, but is not limited to, epilepsy; paralysis; amputation; lack of physical coordination; visual, hearing and speech impediments; and physical reliance on a guide dog, wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device.

Mental disability
Any mental disorder, developmental disorder or learning disorder, regardless of the cause or duration of the disorder.

Age
The Act defines age as 18 years of age or older, which means that individuals 18 and older are protected from age discrimination. However, there are three exceptions specified in the Act that allow for age restrictions: benefits for minors or seniors; seniors-only housing; and age-restricted condominiums, co-operative housing units and mobile home sites, providing the age restrictions were in place before January 1, 2018.

Before January 1, 2018, age was not a protected ground in the area of goods, services, accommodation or facilities customarily available to the public or in the area of tenancy. The Commission cannot accept a complaint based on age in either of these two areas if the alleged incident of discrimination took place before January 1, 2018. In a complaint that cites multiple alleged incidents of discrimination that took place both before and after December 31, 2017, only the incidents that took place after December 31 will be covered under the Act, although the other incidents may be used for context.

For more information about age as a protected ground, see the Commission website at albertahumanrights.ab.ca/services/Pages/age.aspx, or call the Commission’s confidential inquiry line. See Contact us below for contact information.

Individuals under the age of 18 are protected from discrimination in all of the protected areas and on all of the protected grounds except the ground of age. The Alberta Human Rights Commission can accept complaints about discrimination experienced by a person under 18 years of age if the alleged discrimination is based on any of the other protected grounds.
Ancestry
Belonging to a group of people related by a common heritage.

Place of origin
Includes place of birth and usually refers to a country or province.

Marital status
The state of being married, single, widowed, divorced, separated, or living with a person in a conjugal relationship outside marriage.

Source of income
Source of income is defined in the Act as lawful source of income. The protected ground of source of income includes any income that attracts a social stigma to its recipients, for example, social assistance, disability pension, and income supplements for seniors. Income that does not result in social stigma would not be included in this ground.

Family status
The state of being related to another person by blood, marriage or adoption.

Sexual orientation
This ground includes protection from differential treatment based on a person’s actual or presumed sexual orientation, whether gay, lesbian, heterosexual, bisexual or asexual.

In addition to the areas and grounds discussed above, the Act protects Albertans in the area of equal pay. When employees of any gender (female, male, transgender or two-spirited) perform the same or substantially similar work, they must be paid at the same rate.

Contact us
The Alberta Human Rights Commission is an independent commission of the Government of Alberta. Our mandate is to foster equality and reduce discrimination. We provide public information and education programs, and help Albertans resolve human rights complaints.

Hours of operation: 8:15 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Monday to Friday (holidays excluded)
Northern Regional Office (Edmonton)
800 – 10405 Jasper Avenue NW
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4R7
780-427-7661 Confidential Inquiry Line
780-427-6013 Fax

Southern Regional Office (Calgary)
200 J.J. Bowlen Building
620 – 7 Avenue SW
Calgary, Alberta T2P 0Y8
403-297-6571 Confidential Inquiry Line
403-297-6567 Fax

To call toll-free within Alberta, dial 310-0000 and then enter the area code and phone number.

Email: humanrights@gov.ab.ca
Website: albertahumanrights.ab.ca

Please note: The Commission must receive your completed complaint form or letter within one year after the alleged contravention of the Alberta Human Rights Act. The one-year period starts the day after the date on which the alleged contravention of the Act occurred. For help calculating the one-year period, contact the Commission.

The Commission will make this publication available in accessible formats upon request for people with disabilities who do not read conventional print.