

ALBERTA LANGUAGE SECTOR REPORT: FISCAL YEAR 2025– 2026

The purpose of this Year-End Sector Report (2025-2026) is to provide a high-level strategic analysis of the language sector in Alberta during a period of significant systemic transition. It serves as a comprehensive review for stakeholders to understand how Service Provider Organizations (SPOs) are navigating shifting federal policies, evolving newcomer demographics, and operational pressures. The report is based on discussions, action items, themes and topics covered in the following quarterly meeting hosted and facilitated by AAISA in a fiscal year.

- Calgary Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) Providers
- Provincial Language Sector Call (PLSC)
- Portfolio-based Learning Assessment (PBLA) Lead Teachers Meeting

CONTEXT AND SYSTEM OVERVIEW

The 2025–2026 fiscal period has been defined as a year of transition, recalibration, and system strain across Alberta’s settlement and language sector. SPOs have demonstrated institutional resilience while navigating a landscape of shifting demographics and requirements.

Key system drivers include:

- **Funding Realignment:** Managing the phased elimination of Stage 2 programming, scheduled for completion by September 2026.
- **Rising Demand & Learner Complexity:** Sustaining services amidst growing waitlists and a rise in learners with intersecting needs, such as neurodivergence and low digital literacy.
- **System Modernization:** Implementing new assessment and reporting frameworks, specifically iCARE which have introduced intensive administrative adjustments.

TRENDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

- **Shift Toward Foundational Literacy:** There is a pronounced national trend toward CLB Stage 1 and Literacy-focused programming. This has necessitated the rapid development of specialized modules (e.g., CLB 3L/4L) and a pivot toward Stage 1 instructional strategies.
- **Increasing Instructional Complexity:** SPOs report a rise of learners per class – exceeding 25 learners. These cohorts often include individuals with varied neurodivergent profiles and mental health challenges, placing unprecedented demand on instructional design.
- **Assessment & Administrative Pressures:** The current Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA) requirement of 32 assessments per term is increasingly viewed as unsustainable. Instructors face significant administrative overhead in portfolio management, particularly within hybrid and online delivery models.
- **Digital Transformation:** Digital literacy has transitioned from an auxiliary skill to a core requirement. While platforms like *Avenue* and *Google Classroom* are standard, the lack of a formalized national framework has led to inconsistent skill acquisition.

Critical Service Gaps

- **Resourcing & Training Misalignment:** A disconnect exists between rigorous PBLA documentation requirements and allotted paid prep time. Furthermore, new instructors face steep learning curves with insufficient funding for onboarding.
- **Capacity vs. Demand Mismatch:** Funding reductions have resulted in program closures and waitlists exceeding 2,000 learners in high-density regions, resulting in delayed integration outcomes.
- **Specialized Support Deficit:** There is a lack of sustainable access to specialized programming for "non-progressing" learners, such as seniors or those requiring non-linguistic interventions.

Strategic Opportunities

- **System Coordination:** Leveraging the **Knowledge Mobilization Hub** to centralize sector data, improve service navigation, and support evidence-based decision-making.
- **Technological Integration:** Utilizing AI to automate resource generation and administrative tasks, while embedding digital literacy directly into CLB benchmarks.
- **Innovative Partnership Models:** Strengthening collaborations with libraries, schools, and health services to expand community-based classes and integrated service models.



Recommendations

- **Advocate for Sustainable Funding:** Align funding models with actual instructor workloads and the increased costs associated with serving complex-needs populations.
- **Formalize a National Digital Literacy Strategy:** Establish baseline competency standards and fund device access to bridge the digital divide for foundational learners.
- **Strengthen Workforce Mentorship:** Allocate dedicated, non-teaching hours for PBLA Leads to provide the professional support necessary to maintain instructional quality.
- **Expand Specialized Pathways:** Invest in non-linguistic interventions and specialized tracks for learners with complex barriers to ensure equitable integration pathways.

AAISA Highlights and Contributions

- **Sector Capacity Building & Professional Development:** AAISA strengthened sector capacity through targeted professional development aligned with emerging needs, including training on settlement practice, mental health, anti-racism, and supporting complex clients. The transition to a new learning management system improved access to training, while updated onboarding resources supported both new and experienced practitioners in adapting to evolving service demands.
- **Knowledge Mobilization & Resource Development:** AAISA advanced knowledge sharing by developing and disseminating practical resources, including toolkits on anti-racism, mental health, and fraud prevention, alongside sector-focused articles and learning sessions. The launch of the Knowledge Mobilization Hub further enhanced access to centralized data, service information, and resources to support informed decision-making across the sector.
- **Sector Coordination & Systems Leadership:** AAISA played a key coordination role by convening service providers and stakeholders to share updates, address challenges, and align on service delivery. Regular engagement with funders and SPOs supported consistent communication, collective problem-solving, and the sharing of effective practices across the sector.
- **Advocacy & System Influence:** AAISA amplified sector priorities by engaging with funders and stakeholders on key challenges, including funding constraints, waitlists, Stage 2 transitions, and system limitations. Grounded in frontline insights, this advocacy supported more responsive policy discussions and helped organizations navigate a changing environment.



- **Advancing Equity, Anti-Racism & Reconciliation:** AAISA supported the sector in advancing equity through tools, training, and initiatives focused on anti-racism and reconciliation. This included the Anti-Racism Blueprint and efforts to strengthen relationships between newcomer-serving organizations and Indigenous communities, promoting more inclusive and culturally responsive services.
- **Innovation & Strategic Initiatives:** AAISA advanced strategic initiatives to strengthen sector responsiveness, including the Knowledge Mobilization Hub and the Justice Navigator initiative. Exploration of new training areas such as digital literacy also reflects a proactive approach to emerging sector needs.
- **Supporting Sector Adaptation During Transition:** Amid significant system changes, AAISA supported service providers through timely updates, guidance, and opportunities for shared learning. This helped organizations adapt to evolving policies, funding shifts, and operational challenges while maintaining service continuity.

CONCLUSION

The 2025–2026 fiscal year reflects a sector in transition, shaped by evolving client needs and system modernization. While challenges regarding capacity and workforce sustainability remain significant, the move toward collaborative, evidence-based practices provides a foundation for a more resilient settlement landscape in Alberta.