

# Human rights in Alberta

English Express special issue

Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission

## Let's talk about discrimination

These people were discriminated against.  
Have you ever been discriminated against?  
Did you do anything about the discrimination?



Duane



**Duane:** I called about an apartment for rent. I went to see it right away. The landlord looked at me. She said, "Sorry, I don't rent to people like you."



Anna



**Anna:** My boss often touches me. He asks me to have drinks in a bar too. I always say no. I don't want to go with him. He is sexually harassing me. That is discrimination.



John



**John:** I am blind. I use a guide dog. One day, I went to a restaurant. The server said, "You can't bring your dog in here."

## Alberta law protects your rights

Alberta has a law about human rights. It is the **Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act**. This law helps to protect you from discrimination.

■ The Act protects you from discrimination in **5 areas**. For example: employment.



■ The Act also has **13 grounds**. People cannot discriminate against you on these grounds. For example: your religious beliefs.



### Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission

The Commission can give you free information about the Act. The Commission can help you if you are discriminated against.

You can talk to a human rights officer at the Commission. You can tell your story to the officer. Then you can decide what to do. You might make a complaint.

My boss fired me because I am pregnant. What can I do?



Read more about the Commission on page 8.

## What's inside?

### Page 2

5 protected areas

### Pages 3 to 6

13 protected grounds of discrimination

### Page 7

Areas and grounds go together

- Sybil's story
- Raj's story

### Page 8

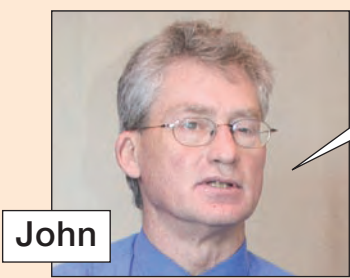
Questions and answers  
How to make a complaint  
Where to get help

Note: This special issue does not use legal language. Contact the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission if you need more information.

# 5 protected areas

The Act protects you in **5 areas**.  
For example:

- when you are at work
- when you rent an apartment
- when you go shopping



I was discriminated against in the area of goods and services.

I was discriminated against in the area of employment.



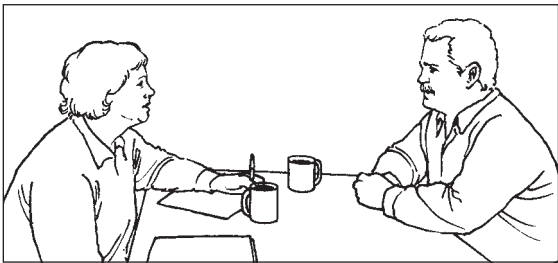
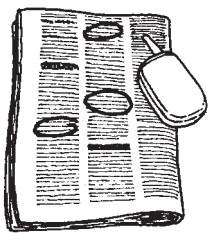
On this page, you will learn about all the areas in the Act.

## 1 Employment

This area covers you when you look for a job and when you have a job.

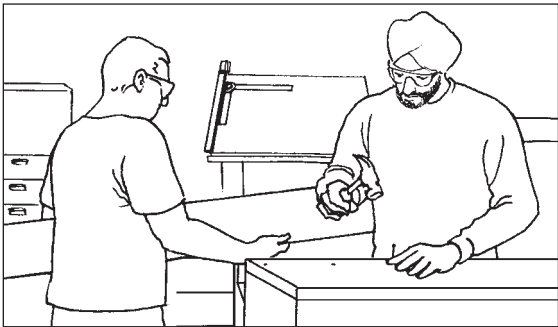
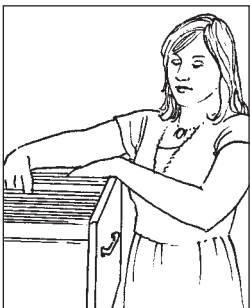
- Employment applications, advertisements or interviews

For example:



- Employment practices

For example:



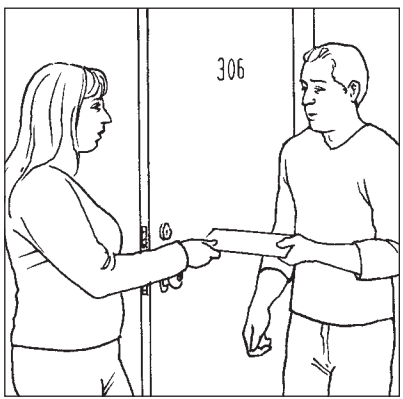
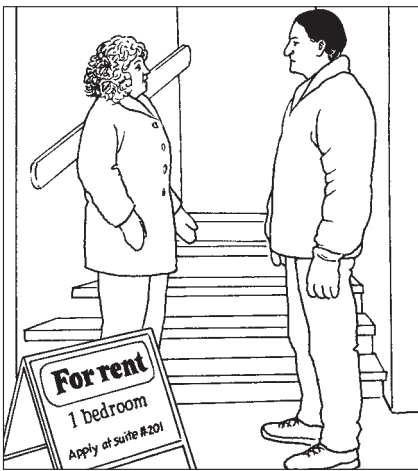
- Equal pay

For example:



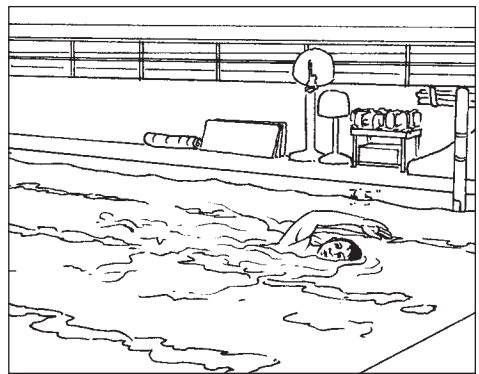
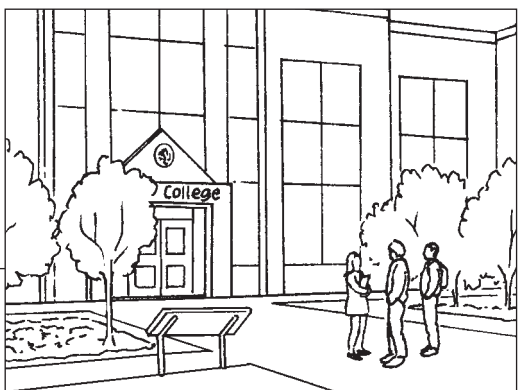
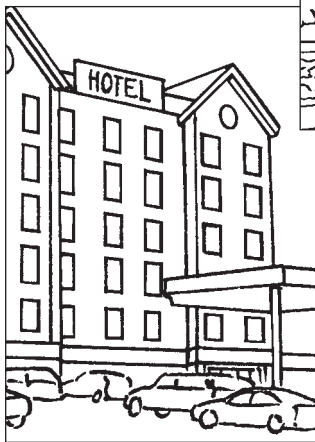
## 2 Tenancy

For example:



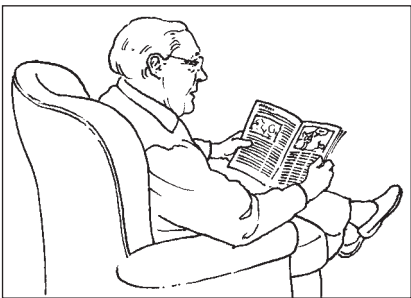
## 3 Goods and services

For example:



## 4 Publications and notices

For example:



## 5 Membership in trade unions

For example:





# 13 protected grounds of discrimination

The Act protects you on **13 grounds**. People cannot discriminate against you based on these 13 grounds.

For example:

- your race
- the colour of your skin

Anna



I was discriminated against because of my gender.

I was discriminated against because of my race and religion.

Raj



On pages 3 to 6, you will learn about all the grounds in the Act.

## 1 Race

People cannot discriminate against you because of your race. For example, a person's race might be Aboriginal, African, Asian or Caucasian.

### Duane's story

I moved to the city a few weeks ago. I look at the apartment ads every day.

One day, I called a landlord. I went to see an apartment. The landlord looked at me. She said, "Sorry, I don't rent to people like you."

I think the landlord discriminated against me because of my race. I am Aboriginal.



## 3 Ancestry

People cannot discriminate against you because of your ancestry. For example, a person's parents might be Aboriginal, Iraqi, Korean or Mexican.

### Maria's story

My parents came to Canada from Mexico. People at work know my ancestry.

One of my co-workers tells jokes about Mexicans. I don't think the jokes are funny. She doesn't tell jokes about other people.

I think my co-worker is harassing me because of my ancestry. That is discrimination.



## 4 Place of origin

People cannot discriminate against you because of your place of origin. Place of origin means where a person was born.



### Kau's story

I'm looking for a better job. I went to a job interview. The interviewer said, "You have an accent. Where were you born?" I said, "China."

The interview was very short. I didn't get the job.

I have lots of work experience in Canada. I think the interviewer discriminated against me because of my place of origin.

## 2 Colour

People cannot discriminate against you because of the colour of your skin. For example, a person's skin might be black, brown or white.

### Angela's story

I was in a restaurant one day. I was the only black customer.

The server didn't come to my table for a long time. When she came to my table, she wasn't very polite to me.

I think the server discriminated against me because of my colour.



## 5 Religious beliefs

People cannot discriminate against you because of your religious beliefs. For example, a person might be Buddhist, Christian, Hindu or Jewish. A person might believe in Aboriginal spirituality.

### Evelyn's story

My co-workers joke about my Aboriginal spirituality. They joke about the sweetgrass in my office.

I think my co-workers are harassing me because of my religious beliefs. That is discrimination.



sweetgrass

### Amir's story



I am Muslim. I pray 5 times a day. Two times are during my work hours.

I want to pray during my breaks. It takes me about 10 minutes to pray. My boss says, "You should pray at home."

I think he is discriminating against me because of my religion.



# 13 protected grounds of discrimination

## 6 Gender

People cannot discriminate against you because of your gender. Gender means male or female.

### Lani's story

I am a carpenter. I went to a job interview. The interviewer said, "You're a nice girl. Why do you want a job as a carpenter? What does your boyfriend think?"

I didn't get the job. I think I was discriminated against because I am female.

You're a nice girl. Why do you want a job as a carpenter?



### Tam's story

I am 4 months pregnant. I told people at work that I am expecting a baby.

Great news!



Two weeks later, my boss fired me. I was very surprised. My boss has always said good things about my work.

I think my boss is discriminating against me because I am pregnant.

I'm fired?!



**Note:** Tam might have other rights. For example: maternity and parental leave. See **Becoming a Parent in Alberta** on page 8.

### James' story

I am a receptionist. I went to a job interview. The interviewer said, "We've never had a male receptionist. The other workers might not like a man in this job."

I didn't get the job. I think I was discriminated against because of my gender.



### Transgendered

Gender also means people who are transgendered. For example:

- a man who has become or wants to become a woman in physical ways
- a woman who has become or wants to become a man in physical ways

### Leslie's story



I was a man for many years. But I felt that I was a woman. I asked doctors to help me change into a woman.

My boss found out that I used to be a man. She fired me. She said, "We don't want people like you here."

I think I was discriminated against because I am transgendered.



## What is harassment?

Harassment can be words or actions. For example: jokes, insults or touching.

Harassment upsets people. It might make them angry, afraid or embarrassed.



### What to do

✓ The Commission may be able to help you if you are harassed. The Act only covers harassment that relates to the 13 grounds of discrimination. For example: gender.

✓ Is someone harassing you? Call the police if you think you are in danger.

### Anna's story

My boss is too friendly. He often touches me. I don't want him to touch me.

Please don't touch me.



My boss also asks me to have drinks with him in a bar. I always say no. He doesn't ask other employees to go to the bar.

My boss is sexually harassing me. I am very upset.

### Many types of harassment

Anna thinks that her boss is sexually harassing her. There are many other types of harassment. For example:

- Maria was harassed because of her ancestry. Read about Maria on page 3.
- Evelyn was harassed because of her religious beliefs. Read about Evelyn on page 3.
- Raj was harassed because of his race and religion. Read about Raj on page 7.



# 13 protected grounds of discrimination

## 7 Physical disability

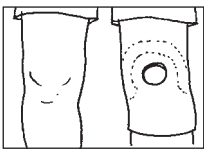
People cannot discriminate against you because of your physical disabilities.

There are many kinds of physical disabilities. For example:

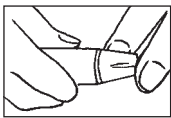
■ Ed was born with cerebral palsy. He uses a wheelchair.



■ Ty hurt his knee in an accident. He can't bend his knee very much.



■ Gita has diabetes. She checks her blood sugar often. She has a special diet.



### John's story

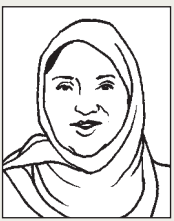
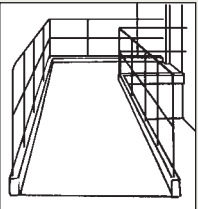
I am blind. I can't see. I use a guide dog.  
One day, I went to a restaurant. The server said, "You can't bring your dog in here."  
I know that guide dogs can go into restaurants. I think I was discriminated against because of my disability.



## Workers' needs

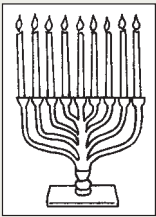
Workers have different needs. For example, a worker with a disability might have different needs than other workers.  
Employers must try hard to accommodate their workers' needs. The Act only covers the needs that relate to the 13 protected grounds. For example:

"I use a wheelchair. I need a wheelchair ramp at work."



"I wear a hijab. I can't take it off at work. I need to wear it with my work uniform."

"I am pregnant. I need to sit down at work."



"I am Jewish. I want to take a day off for an important religious holiday."

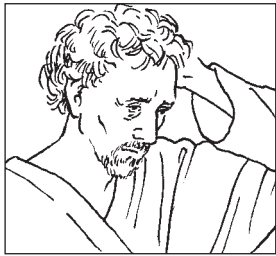
## 8 Mental disability

People cannot discriminate against you because of your mental disabilities.

There are many kinds of mental disabilities. For example:

■ Carl has depression. It is a mental illness. Sometimes it is hard for him to go to work because he is depressed.

Carl often feels very sad and tired. He isn't sleeping well. He feels that his life is hopeless.



### Tara's story

I'm a student. I have dyslexia. It is a learning disability. My teacher knows about my disability.  
In my classes, I can't listen and take notes at the same time. So I use a tape recorder. I also can't write fast on exams.  
One day, we had a substitute teacher because our regular teacher was sick. I asked the new teacher for extra time. She said, "No, everyone gets the same time for the test."  
I think I was discriminated against because of my disability.



### Josh's story

I fell off my bike 2 years ago. I got a brain injury. Before my accident, I was a cashier in a grocery store.



After my accident, I couldn't be a cashier. I got very tired. I couldn't work fast enough.

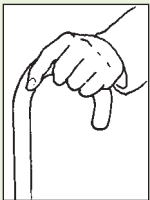
My boss said, "I'll find you another job in the store."  
Now I stock shelves. I can take a short break when I am tired. My boss accommodated my needs.



## Both physical and mental disabilities

Some people have both physical and mental disabilities. For example:

■ Nadia had a stroke. It damaged her brain. She has a physical disability now. She has trouble walking.

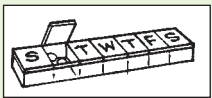


Nadia also has a mental disability. She often can't understand what people are saying.



■ Mike was born with fetal alcohol syndrome. His mother drank alcohol when she was pregnant. The alcohol damaged his brain and his heart.

Mike needs help to do some things. For example: to manage his money.  
Mike takes medicine for his heart problem.





13 protected grounds of discrimination

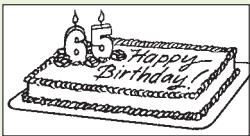
9 Age

If you are 18 or older

People cannot discriminate against you because of your age in 3 of the 5 areas:

- employment
- publications and notices
- membership in trade unions

For example, an employer usually cannot make you retire because you are 65 years old.



Age is **not** a protected ground in these 2 areas:

- tenancy
- goods and services

For example, an apartment building can be for adults only.



George's story

I am 60 years old. I applied for a job as a caretaker of a small apartment building. I'm very healthy. I can do the job.

Last week, I went for an interview. The interviewer asked me, "Aren't you too old for this job?" He didn't want to hire me.

I think I was discriminated against because of my age.



George

If you are under 18 years old

You cannot make complaints about discrimination because of your age. You can make complaints on all other grounds.

13 Sexual orientation

People cannot discriminate against you because of your sexual orientation. A person might be:

- heterosexual: a person who is sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex
- homosexual (gay or lesbian): a person who is sexually attracted to people of the same sex
- bisexual: a person who is sexually attracted to people of both sexes

Monica's story

I worked at my last job for 3 months. My boss was happy with my work.

I applied for medical benefits from the company. I filled out a form. I wrote my partner's name, Nancy, on the form.

Then my boss fired me. I think I was discriminated against because I am a lesbian.



Monica

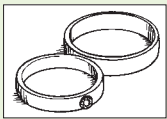
Nancy

**Note:** The Act does not list sexual orientation as a protected ground. But in 1998, the Supreme Court of Canada decided that Alberta must "read" sexual orientation into the Act.

10 Marital status

People cannot discriminate against you because of your marital status. For example:

- single
- married
- divorced
- living common-law
- widowed



Marta's story

I work for a small company. I applied for a different job in the company.

The manager said, "You're married, aren't you? This job isn't good for you. You will have to travel a lot."

I didn't get the job. I think I was discriminated against because of my marital status.

11 Family status

People cannot discriminate against you because of your family status. For example:

- A couple might have a big family.



Ray's story

My wife and I have 4 young children. We are looking for a bigger apartment.

One landlord said, "This building isn't good for you. Your children will make noise and damage the apartment."

My wife and I think we were discriminated against because of our family status.

12 Source of income

People cannot discriminate against you because of your source of income. For example:

- A person might get income support (welfare) from the government.
- A person with a disability might get AISH\* from the government. AISH helps pay for living costs and health costs.



\*AISH means Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped.

Sybil's story

I rent an apartment for me and my 2 children. I lost my job. Now I'm getting welfare.

My landlord said, "I don't want people on welfare here. Find a job or get out."

I think I am being discriminated against because of my source of income.



Read more about Sybil on page 7.



# Areas and grounds go together

## Sybil's story

Sybil was discriminated against in the **area** of tenancy. The **ground** is source of income.

**1** I am a single parent. My sons are 3 and 5 years old. I am unemployed. I get income support (welfare) from the government. The money will help me until I get a new job.



**2** Recently, my landlord told me, "I don't want people on welfare here. Find a job or get out." I was upset. I always pay my rent on time. I am a good tenant.

**3** Then my landlord gave me a letter. It says I have to move out of my apartment in 3 months.



**4** My sister told me to call the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission.



**5** I called the Commission. I talked to a human rights officer.



**6** I learned about my rights.



**7** Later, I talked to my landlord. He still says that I have to leave. I'm going to make a complaint.



Read about complaints on page 8.

## Raj's story

Raj was discriminated against in the **area** of employment. The **grounds** are race and religion.

**1** I am the only Sikh at work. Everybody there knows me.



**2** Recently, a new man at work made fun of my religion. Then other workers started to make fun of me.



**3** I spoke to my co-workers.



**4** I spoke to a friend. He told me to talk to my supervisor.



**5** My supervisor had a staff meeting. She talked to everyone about human rights.



**6** My supervisor asked me to give a talk about Sikhism at the next staff meeting.



**7** I am happy at work now. I am glad I told my supervisor about this problem.



## Questions and answers

The Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission can give **free** help to all Albertans.

**Q:** I want to talk to a human rights officer about a problem at work. Will the officer tell my boss?



**A:** If you just want information, your story is confidential. The officer will not talk to anyone about your story.

If you make a complaint, the officer will talk to your boss. The officer will need information from your boss.

**Q:** Can my boss fire me because I make a complaint?



**A:** Your boss should not fire you because you make a complaint. If your boss fires you, you can complain to the Commission.

**Q:** I think a landlord discriminated against me. How much time do I have to make a complaint?

**A:** You have 1 year from the date that she discriminated against you.

**Tip:** Write down what happened so you don't forget. You can ask a friend or family member to help you.

Date:

Place:

Name of person:

Names of witnesses:

What happened:

**Q:** Can someone help me fill out the complaint form?



**A:** A human rights officer can help you fill out the form. You can also ask a friend or family member to help you.

## Where to get help

### Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission

#### Phone

Calgary: 403-297-6571

Edmonton: 780-427-7661

Outside Calgary and Edmonton: Call 310-0000 (free). Then enter the Calgary or Edmonton area code and number.

#### People who are deaf or hard of hearing with TTY

Calgary: 403-297-5639

Edmonton: 780-427-1597

Outside Calgary and Edmonton: 1-800-232-7215 (free)

#### Website

[www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca](http://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca)

**Note:** Anyone can get help from the Commission. For example:

- if you think someone discriminated against you
- if someone says you discriminated against them

## Free booklet for parents

### Becoming a Parent in Alberta

Learn about human rights at work if you are pregnant. Learn about maternity and parental leave, and about benefits.

To order, call the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission. See phone numbers above.

You can download a PDF at:

[www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca](http://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca)

## How to make a complaint

Do you want to make a complaint? Talk to a human rights officer. Then you can decide what to do.

### Here are the main steps to make a complaint

**1** Fill out a complaint form. You are the **complainant**. An officer, friend or family member can help you fill out the form.



complaint

**2** The **respondent** is the person who you think discriminated against you. This person gets a copy of your complaint.



**3** The respondent will write an answer (response) to your complaint. You will get a copy.

**4** The human rights officer will work with you and the respondent to solve the problem.

The Commission does not take your side or the respondent's side.



human rights officer

respondent



complainant

### What might happen?

What might happen if there was discrimination? Here are a few examples. The respondent might have to:

- ✓ apologize to you
- ✓ change a workplace rule
- ✓ learn more about human rights
- ✓ pay you lost wages

## How to order this issue

You can order tabloid-sized copies of this issue from the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission. See phone numbers above.

### On the Internet:

- ✓ You can print a booklet-sized copy of this issue.
- ✓ You can listen to this issue.
- ✓ You can print Teaching Notes for this issue.



Go to: [www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca](http://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca)  
Type English Express in the search box.

Special thanks to the Advisory Committee and other reviewers, and to the volunteers in the photos. **Note:** The stories in this special issue are fictional. The people in the photos are volunteers. They portray fictional characters.

*English Express* is for adults who are improving their English reading skills.

**Human Rights in Alberta** is a special issue of *English Express*. It was published by the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission, in co-operation with Alberta Advanced Education and Technology.

©2008, Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission

Human Rights in Alberta  
2008 ISSN0825-5466

Alberta



Alberta Human Rights  
and Citizenship Commission