

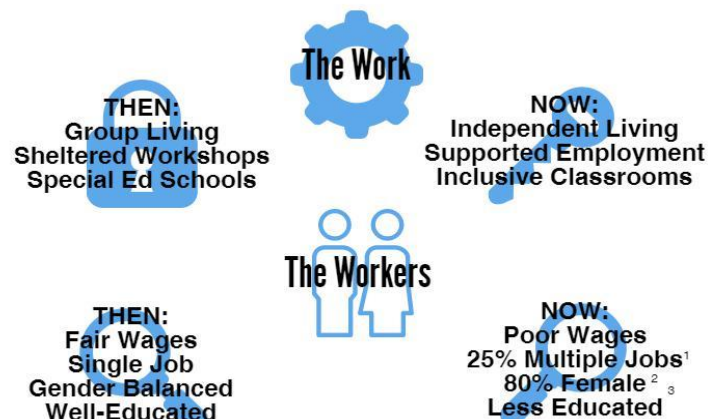
What Disability Workers Do

Disability workers play a vital role in supporting individuals with intellectual, physical and/or emotional disabilities to live, work and play in their communities. This broad scope of practice extends far beyond the standard definition of *caregiving* (i.e., following a care plan and providing assistance with bathing, grooming and other activities of daily life); the aim, as stated in the *Persons with Developmental Disabilities Program Manual*, is to support individuals “with developmental disabilities **to be included in community life and to be as independent as possible.**”
<http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/pdd-online/program-purpose.aspx>

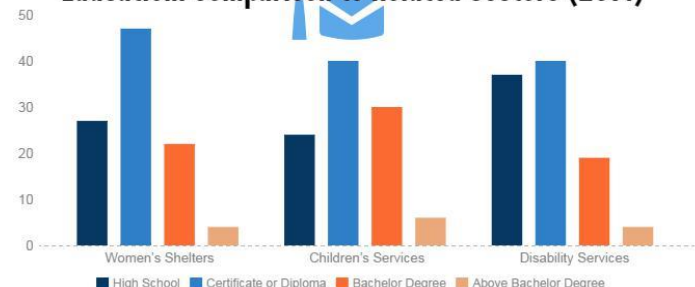
A disability worker must have the skill sets of a **teacher, advocate, employment counselor, researcher, social worker, community developer** and more in order to carry out their work competently. Disability workers are expected to be able to help individuals

- find fulfilling work, develop good work habits and job skills so that they fit in and are assets to their workplace
- get connected to other resources, social groups, and activities of interest in their community
- participate in community life, by supporting the community to welcome them and engage with them as interesting fellow citizens with something to offer
- learn to manage their limited money, busy schedules, and households
- understand complicated social, medical and political systems so that they can advocate effectively for what they need, or advocate for and with them if necessary
- maintain their health by providing safe, respectful and sensitive personal care or medication support
- manage the frustrations and emotional triggers that are part of life using effective coping strategies
- deal with transitions in life from childhood to adulthood to retirement to end-of-life

Disability Services Then & Now



Education: Comparison to Related Sectors (2014)⁴



The Impact of Wages

Up until the early 1980s, community-based disability worker wages were comparable to wages in other social services sectors and equivalent

2015

Average Minimum Wage - Community Disability Worker⁵

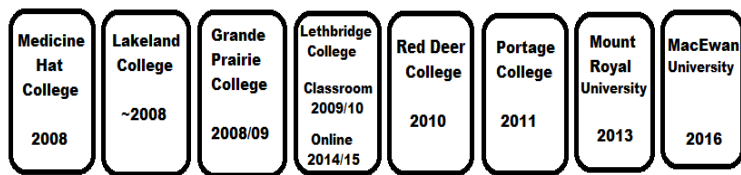
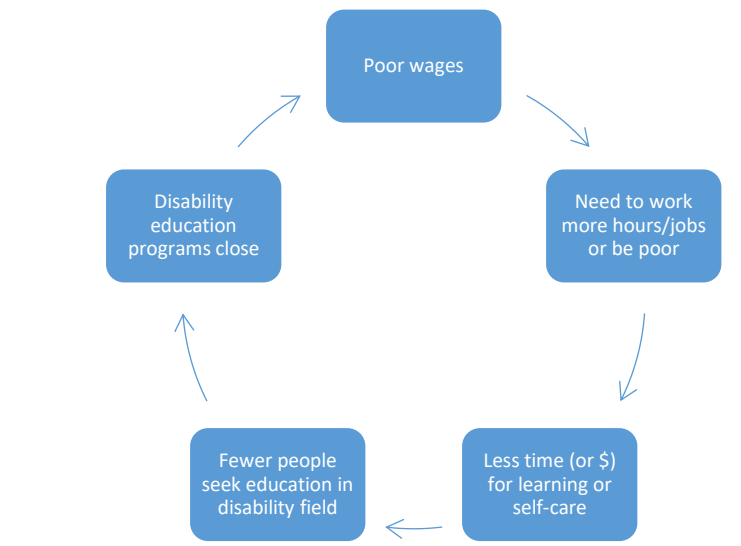
\$16.37

Starting Wage - Government Disability Worker⁶

\$19.92

Community Turnover⁷

22.6%



government positions. Over time, this has changed, as have the demands of the work and the characteristics of those performing it.

As community disability worker wages failed to keep up with inflation and compensation in equivalent government positions and related sectors, this had negative impacts on the workforce and post-secondary education opportunities. With fewer people seeking post-secondary education because they could not afford to take on debt unmatched by wage levels, many disability services-related Alberta education programs closed. ***This is a situation that cannot continue and wages are the key.***

As a result of limited access to educational programs, the current workforce has less education and training than their predecessors while supporting Albertans who have more complex needs than before. Those who wish to further their education in the field have fewer college or university programs available.

Programs that have closed can be reinstated. For instance, the disability worker program at Bow Valley College closed in

2008/09 but was re-established in 2014. The MacEwan University program could also be restored.

Currently, two accredited colleges in Alberta (Bow Valley College and NorQuest College) have programs preparing front-line human service workers—including disability workers, while two others (University of Calgary, MacEwan University’s Bachelor of Applied Human Service Administration) prepare people for supervisory and management roles. Four private institutions in Alberta (Columbia College, Excel Academy, Training Inc. and Alberta Council of Disability Services) also have programs for the front-line workforce. Available programs vary considerably in length and share no provincially standardized curriculum.

With at least 13,000 individuals employed in the sector and an average turnover rate of about 20% year after year, we need approximately 2,600 new workers each year, far more than current programs can supply. Other human service sectors are paid more and draw many graduates of the current educational programs away from disability services.

Certification: Promoting Excellent Practice and Professionalism

We are at a crucial time in our sector where we must make a strong stand to create and maintain a professional workforce that is certified to have demonstrated a standard of competencies. The skills are necessary. If there is not standardized formal education available, then the skills must be learned via experience over time. During the learning process, individuals with disabilities may not get the best or smoothest support and, with high turnover due to low wages, must continually teach new staff how to provide support that meets their needs.

Certification promotes excellent practices and professionalism; it tells government funders, employers and the public that disability workers have the core skills necessary to provide effective service. ADWA Certification is based on a rigorous assessment of whether the individual worker meets accepted standards in sector-identified core competencies. From the very beginning, ADWA has been diligent about including all stakeholders throughout the entire planning process. We continue on our shared journey with the beginning stages of a certification pilot group. As a community, the disability services sector relies heavily on support from GOA funding. We cannot meet our vision without ongoing collaborative and financial commitments.

Is this a Minimum Wage Job?

Sales clerks (retail and non-retail), hotel and food service workers make up more than half the current minimum wage workforce in Alberta. Nearly one-third of minimum wage workers are under 20 and have less than a high school diploma. Over 80% have held their minimum wage jobs for less than 5 years.ⁱ The work requires little education, training,

skill or experience to become competent and errors have limited impact on people's lives. This image is reflected in government ads.

By comparison, disability workers nearly all have a high school diploma (63% have a Certificate, Diploma or Degreeⁱⁱ), and 39% have worked in disability services for 5 years or more.ⁱⁱⁱ The work is complex, and errors can have grave consequences.

Do disability workers earn minimum wage? Minimum wage increases have affected the wages of about 5% of the disability services workforce for a portion of their wages, most of whom earn minimum wage only during asleep-overnight shifts.^{iv} Asleep-overnight services are required by individuals who need support available to deal with an emergency or other unusual event, and where active vigilance is not required (i.e., awake-overnight shiftwork).

Have the minimum wage increases benefited disability workers? When the minimum wage was increased in 2015 and 2016, Government of Alberta contracts for disability services were not adjusted to accommodate service providers' need to increase wages for minimum wage earners in the sector. The only way to pay asleep-overnight and other minimum wage earners more, as required by law, is to pay other disability workers less or reduce hours of service to individuals with disabilities in order to prevent further wage compression for other disability workers.

What do we need to avert crisis?

In 2009, the previous provincial government had recognized the crisis in the disability services sector and their role in it as the funder of services. They made a commitment to increase funding for compensation to community disability service providers by 30% over 3 years to be used to address workforce issues and reduce turnover. That commitment was only partially fulfilled with 25% increases over 4 years. The final 5% was never delivered to the community, while government wages for equivalent positions continued to increase by 11.2% over the same period. The result is that the gap between starting community salaries and government salaries averaged nearly 22% in 2015 and has grown since, as government workers have received a further raise in 2016, while community disability workers have again received none.

We ask that as MLAs, you recognize the role that government has in the ability of the sector to deliver effective services to a marginalized population. Deliver on the promise of the final 5% increase for disability worker compensation and address the—once again—growing wage gap between government and their community counterparts.

Furthermore, we ask that you address the sector needs for access to advanced education opportunities by revitalizing post-secondary programs in the field, so that workers can once again gain the necessary knowledge and skills through a formal education process.

Finally, we ask you to commit the government of Alberta to supporting ADWA's certification pilot project and to working collaboratively with us to implement certification for our workforce.

References for Page 1 chart

¹"Compensation and Commitment Survey Report," Alberta Disability Workers Association, September 2015

^{2&7}"ACDS 2015 Annual Data Analysis Report," Alberta Council of Disability Services, August 2016

^{3&4}"Extent of the 'Main Association Contracted Sector' Report," Boles Consulting, 2014.

⁵"ACDS Survey of Salaries and Selected Human Resource Practices," Peter T. Boland & Associates, August 2015

⁶"Public Service Commission Salary Grids for 2015 – Individual Support I," Government of Alberta, 2015.

ⁱ"Alberta Minimum Wage Profile 2015-2016," Government of Alberta, May 2016. <https://work.alberta.ca/documents/alberta-minimum-wage-profile.pdf>

ⁱⁱ"Extent of the 'Main Association Contracted Sector' Report," Boles Consulting, 2014.

ⁱⁱⁱ"ACDS 2015 Annual Data Analysis Report," Alberta Council of Disability Services, August 2016.

^{iv}"Minimum Wage Increases," Alberta Council of Disability Services, 2015.

Alberta's minimum wage goes up October 1st

\$11.20 general minimum wage

\$10.70 liquor server minimum wage

Alberta  work.alberta.ca

Alberta minimum wage increase to \$12.20 on Oct. 1, 2016

