



Community Supports for
Adults with Disabilities
The Challenges and Policy Options

Policy Briefing

August 2007

Executive Summary

The Community Disability Sector provides services to 15,000¹ adults and children with disabilities and employs a workforce of 17,000². In some rural communities, the Disability Services sector is the major employer.

The purpose of the work is to support people with disabilities and their families to overcome the obstacles they can face each day. The work helps people with developmental disabilities to experience the joy and fulfilment of being a valued and respected member of their neighbourhoods, schools and workplaces.

Well-trained, knowledgeable support workers are able to teach skills, are key for achieving community inclusion and independence. Individuals and families expect workers to be knowledgeable about specific disabilities, see to the physical needs of the individuals they support (e.g. tube feeding, administering medication, personal care), support individual development, develop community networks, provide daily living support at home, in the work place and in the community and facilitate health care management.

Two major reviews of the disability service sector have been done by the government of Alberta including *Charting the Future Direction* under, the then Minister, the Honourable Roy Brassard and *The Building Better Bridges* study that was done under Honourable Gene Zwozdesky. Both reports recognized that this sector provided exemplary supports to citizens with developmental disabilities and that the government should be proud of the progressive approach Alberta has taken in supporting citizens with developmental disabilities. Both reports also made recommendations that government address the significant underfunding of wages and infrastructure supports to ensure this valuable sector was maintained. Steps were undertaken to begin the process of addressing these fundamental problems however the multi-year requirements to address the issues were overtaken by other events.

The Community Disability Service sector is facing significant issues related to its long-term viability to be an effective resource to individuals with disabilities and their families and guardians. These include:

- A province wide **crisis in staffing** where shortages and turnover is chronic and the consequences are potentially dangerous for individuals and remaining staff.
- Shifting uncertainty in the roles and relationships between the service providers, Person with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) regional boards and the government is causing confusion and inefficiencies within the sector. **Governance** in all its aspects must to be examined.
- Concerns over what exactly is the **governing philosophy** that is guiding the government of Alberta as it deals with the policy challenges and **systemic solutions** in meeting the needs of citizens with developmental disabilities, many of whom are represented by the Public Guardian and do not have the benefit of a family support system.

¹ Who is Receiving Services, June 2005, www.communitydisabilityservicesalberta.com

² Workforce Profile and Employer Perspectives: Report from Survey of Rehabilitation Service Providers in Alberta, April 2005, www.communitydisabilityservicesalberta.com

Community Supports for Adults with Disabilities **The Challenges and Policy Options**

The Community Disability Service sector sees service provider agencies facing a province wide crisis in staffing where shortages and turnover is chronic and the consequences are potentially dangerous for individuals and remaining staff. The next serious issue in need of attention is the shifting uncertainty in the roles and relationships between the service providers, Person with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) regional boards and the government. What is the exact nature of the legal relationships in this governance and service delivery model? Who is in charge, who is responsible to whom for what and is the transparency and integrity of the system as open and accountable as it should be? Finally there are concerns over what exactly is the governing philosophy that is guiding the government of Alberta as it deals with the policy challenges in meeting the needs of citizens with developmental disabilities, many of whom are represented by the Public Guardian and do not have the benefit of a family support system.

A Cornerstone of Alberta's Past and Future

Community Disability Services as a sector has a long and rich history in Alberta.

Services to persons with disabilities started as a full government responsibility. This was a period of thinking that is referred to as the Medical Model (1850's to 1970's). The medical model was based on the belief that people with disabilities are sick and therefore need to be healed. People were called patients. When it was determined that treatment would not result in a cure for people with disabilities such as Down's Syndrome, institutions for custodial care emerged. This period also saw the advent of the Eugenics Movement in Alberta.

The next stage of thinking for support of people with developmental disabilities is the Developmental Model. It started during the 1950's and 60's through parents and family associations believing that people with developmental disabilities could learn and grow and they had the right to keep their children in their home communities. It was during the 1970's that disability began to be viewed along a continuum of functioning. Assessments were developed that determined each individual's level of functioning and then determined the services that were most appropriate. This was the era when community service agencies were developed by government in response to families wanting their children to live in their home communities. The Alberta Progressive Conservative party came to power in 1971 with one of their key platforms being services to persons with disabilities. Once in office the Lougheed government introduced the Handicapped Children's Program and Services to Person with Disabilities for Adults.

Both the medical model and the developmental model can be described as a view that recognizes that disability resides within the person or that the "problem" is the person who needs to be fixed.

With the support of the governing philosophy of government, services to persons with disabilities continued to be developed throughout the 1970's, 80's and 90's. The prevailing view of "disability" started to change towards seeing the "problem" residing in society not the

individual. Society became a major focus and this included concern over human rights issues, removal of environmental barriers, promotion of inclusion and positive attitudes towards people with disabilities, and recognition of the gifts and capacity of people with disabilities. It was during this period that the Government of Alberta saw “community” as the place that could most effectively offer human services. The Community Disability Service Provider’s in the form of non-profits were nurtured and developed through government policy and funding as they emerged to take on this important obligation of government.

New community development governance models emerged in the developmental disability sector in the late 1990’s based on a philosophy of further delegation of decision making and accountability to the local community. This resulted in the creation of the government appointed Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Boards on both a province wide and regional basis. Along with the earlier approaches to services, the community development model started to emerge strongly.

Two major systemic reviews of the disability service sector have been done by the government of Alberta including *Charting the Future Direction* under, the then Minister, the Honourable Roy Brassard and *The Building Better Bridges* study that was done under Honourable Gene Zwozdesky. Both reports recognized that this sector provided exemplary supports to citizens with developmental disabilities and that the government should be proud of the progressive approach Alberta has taken in supporting citizens with developmental disabilities. Both reports also made recommendations that government address the significant under funding of wages and infrastructure supports to ensure this valuable sector was maintained. Steps were undertaken to begin the process of addressing these fundamental problems however the multi-year requirements to address the issues were overtaken by other events.

Community Disability Services

The Alberta Council of Disability Services (ACDS) has led the way in the development of new and innovative Best Practices that have informed the field of disability services. They have partnered collaboratively to influence policy changes that more effectively meet the needs of the citizens receiving services. ACDS has responded proactively to challenges and changes in government and community. Our member agencies include faith-based and parent led not-for-profit and private organizations. Their volunteer boards are active members of their communities and have raised a significant amount of supplemental money for the sector all over Alberta. The Executive Directors and staff are progressive and innovative leaders in this field.

The purpose of the work is to support people with disabilities and their families to overcome the obstacles they can face each day. Many individuals do not have the benefit of a family support system. The work helps people with developmental disabilities to experience the joy and fulfilment of being valued and respected members of their neighbourhoods, schools and workplaces. Clearly there is an essential and vital contribution being made to the economic strength and social cohesion of Alberta.

The Community Disability Sector provides services to 15,000³ adults and children with

³ Who is Receiving Services, June 2005, www.communitydisabilityservicesalberta.com

disabilities and employs a workforce of 17,000⁴. In some rural communities, the Disability Services sector is the major employer.

Service supports are tailored to individuals and their families. The level of service support can range from a few hours a week to 24 hours per day. Data indicates that only 3,231 of the individuals receiving support access 24 hour support. The vast majority of individuals are able to be part of personal networks that provide the remaining support when required. 82% of the workforce is front-line workers providing direct support to individuals with developmental disabilities and 10% of the workforce is front-line supervisors.

Research on the income⁵ level indicates that:

- 58% of the workforce views this work as their primary source of income into their household.
 - 13.6 % make \$20,000 or less per year
 - 35.6% earn between \$20,001-\$30,000
 - 28.3 % earn between \$30,001-\$40,000
 - 14.1% earn between 40,001-\$50,000
 - 3.1% earn over \$50,000

This high standard of care has been challenged and is now rapidly deteriorating. One major reason is that there is an average annual staff turnover rate of 40% among disability sector staff working with contracted Community Disability Service Providers. Many of these staff work with the predominantly not-for-profit organizations represented by ACDS. With the funding models and resources currently allocated to them, ACDS members are unable to pay competitive wages and benefits to retain staff in order to provide the appropriate service levels for individuals.

The gap in resourcing between government delivered services and Community Disability Services is widening and is now at the point that the Community Disability Service Provider category can no longer compete for staff and infrastructure needs. A recent review noted that this gap in Community Disability Service Provider wages and mid-range government staff in similar positions was \$83 million. When benefits and administration costs are included the difference is over \$139 million.

The challenge for the Government of Alberta, therefore, is to ensure it has the necessary policy and resources in place so that:

- the Government of Alberta is able to fulfill its responsibility to provide for an appropriate and effective client-centered service system to adult Albertans with developmental disabilities who require care and support. This may require the Government of Alberta to declare its intent to either appropriately support Community Disability Services or return to the government based service model;
- the Government of Alberta has an appropriate and effective allocation policy for the PDD spending envelope, to ensure a sustainable, consistent, fair, transparent, and accountable standard of client-centered care and support;

⁴ Workforce Profile and Employer Perspectives: Report from Survey of Rehabilitation Service Providers in Alberta, April 2005, www.communitydisabilityservicesalberta.com

⁵ Issues for Staff Working with People with Developmental Disabilities: Northwest Alberta, 2007, www.communitydisabilityservicesalberta.com

- the Government of Alberta has an appropriate resource allocation between contracted Community Disability Service Providers and any regional governance structure that does not detract from the service providers ability to meet the contractual obligation to the province and the legal obligations to individuals, including but not restricted to being able to provide and sustain the necessary cohort of trained and skilled staff.
- the Government of Alberta develop and implement a more effective governance model and resource allocation policy to better meet the legal, moral and ethical obligations to adult Albertans with developmentally disabilities;
- the Government of Alberta review the size and scope of the government spending envelope to ensure it is adjusted on a regular basis to meet the above objectives plus any population growth pressures, increased cost of doing business pressures to service providers caused by inflation, the various other market based operational pressures (heat, power, water etc.) plus any changes in the scope of service demands imposed by the Government of Alberta or its agents from time to time.

With that in mind, the following discussion provides context and background to identify and focus discussion on the specific challenges that relate to the future viability of Community Disability Services.

Challenges

Challenge #1: Social Infrastructure Deficit

There has been considerable media and political attention paid to the challenges facing Albertans in regards to maintenance of the physical infrastructure; this includes lack of housing, stressed transportation systems, and strains on municipal infrastructure, education and health facilities. These same growth pressures are hurting the social infrastructure in Alberta as well. Managing economic growth pressures is affecting the quality of life of all Albertans and vulnerable Albertans in particular. The booming Alberta economy has created an “infrastructure deficit”, caused by rapid growth and past neglect of physical and human capital system maintenance. Add in a growing population, combined with outdated disability sector funding and accountability mechanisms, we now have an incapability of the system to meet legitimate, contracted and legally required client service-demands, including Employment Standards, Occupational Health and Safety requirements and other legislated policies such as Working Alone.

Challenge #2: Uncompetitive Wages are Driving Staff Out of the Sector

There are staff and skills shortages in most areas of Alberta’s economy right now. Competition for skilled personnel is high and most sectors are experiencing significant demands for wage increases to attract and retain workers and meet the rising cost of living. The Community Disability Services sector is not able to increase the wages it is paying its staff. The PDD Boards place restrictions and guidelines on funding of wages and benefits. Experienced and qualified staff are leaving Community Disability Services to take positions in other industries, not because they want to, but because they have to in order to make a living wage and to support their own families.

The end result is that Service Providers often have to hire staff with less than ideal capacities and without the level of qualifications and training as before. Even the best intentioned of staff cannot meet the very complex needs of some dual diagnosed individuals with both health and

developmental disabilities. This puts everyone in the system, especially the client, at serious risk.

The Community Disability Services sector has for many years provided quality services for historically lower wages, but services have now reached a level of disparity where that can no longer happen. The sector has lost too many experienced skilled professionals and it can no longer inspire a new generation to work for “the love of the job alone”.

Challenge #3: Funding that is Approved by Government Does not get to Staff Wages.

Recent announcements of funding to address recruitment and retention issues have not accurately reflected the complexity of distributing funds. Much of these funds did not necessarily reach the agency staff level.

- Of the 39 million recently announced as having been distributed over the past 18 months, 10 million was rolled out in 2005, 11 million was distributed as one time bonuses in 2007, and the 18 million identified in the March 2007 Government Budget has not been distributed to date.
- Our understanding is that a significant portion of the 18 million allocated will first be directed to government staff wage increases, client uptake and high needs client costs. Remaining dollars for agency staff wages are being directed by Regional PDD Boards to specific agency positions and classifications with no consultation nor input from service providers.

Challenge #4: Staff Shortages are Alarming

Low wages and high workloads have combined to create a chronic position-vacancy situation and a staff turnover rate of 40% per annum on average. These staffing shortages are seriously undermining client service levels. Existing staff burnout is also contributing to an untenable situation and an increasing inability for service providers to meet the duties and contractual obligations they owe to the Government of Alberta and to their individuals.

There is some evidence that the staff shortage crisis can be resolved by paying Community Disability Service workers wages and benefits that are comparable to those of government workers. For example, the staff turnover rate in government owned and operated institutions are only 12%, even in the face of other employment alternatives in Alberta’s booming economy. The ACDS membership believes a 12% staff turnover rate can be accommodated in the Community Disability Service sector and assumes that comparative pay to government employees would result in similar staff vacancy and turnover rates as in government.

The ACDS has studied and reported on the workforce issues and challenges for its members in Community Disability Services in a report released publicly in August 2006 entitled “A Human Resource Crisis in the Disability Services Field.” The closing of the wage gap with government employees is seen to be one part of a solution needed to retain, recruit and revitalize this vital public service obligation to Albertans with developmental disabilities. Other Alberta government departments, notably Health and Wellness and Children’s Services, have recently publicly recognized the need to close the gap between government employees and not-for-profit, Community Disability Service Providers within their jurisdiction. However, no such public comment or commitment has yet been forthcoming from the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports, which funds the adult developmental disability services sector programs.

Challenge #5: Forecasting and Budgeting Process

The forecasting and budgeting process currently used by the regional PDD Boards needs to be reviewed. The current dependence on forecasting for growth or uptake of new individuals based on an estimation of “expectations and need” is not reliable and does not reflect nor accommodate the capacity issues of agencies and their abilities to meet such needs. The current fiscal model results in a frustrating cycle of Regional PDD Boards predicting deficits, clawing back funds from Community Disability Service Providers, and then announcing year-end surpluses and invitations for one-time spending frenzies on projects, supplies or bonuses. The information systems and measurement tools informing the budget planners and decision makers , and required to be tracked by service providers, do not seem to be linked in a manner that best informs the system . The resulting cycle of crisis and wealth does not allow for effective or efficient planning.

Challenge #6: Sector’s Costs for Client Services

There is a need for greater transparency in the reporting of expenditures made by the PDD system. Based on disclosures and presentation methods in PDD annual reports, it is not possible to clearly and accurately determine the allocated costs of various services or to identify the number and nature of service needs of individuals who are in the direct care of the Government of Alberta. This being the case, it is not possible, therefore, to accurately isolate and determine the costs of Community Disability Service Provider services because they are consolidated with some direct government service activities.

The approach being articulated by the Minister responsible and others is that the \$528 million provincial budget allocation for the sector serves approximately 9,100 adult Albertans with developmental disabilities, spending an average of between \$58,000 and \$61,000 per client.

Use of over-simplified average-cost calculations masks trends and problems, making effective and efficient planning for better outcomes more difficult. The first assumption is that “one size fits all” when it comes to client service costs. Not all individuals have the same needs and not all programs have the same associated costs. Neither are these costs the same in all regions of the Province. The second assumption is that individuals are evenly distributed throughout the various services being provided by the sector and that the age distribution of these individuals is not a factor in cost of providing service.

Service demands range from constant residential staffing 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to supported home living or accessible out-of-home support. The type and level of service depends upon the nature of the disability, and the age and capability of the client. Distance and distribution and business realities differ throughout the province and drive different costs.

In an effort to provide clarity and a more comprehensive understanding of the PDD client costs, ACDS has done some preliminary analysis based on the PDD database of 2004 and PDD Statement of Operations of March 31, 2006. This analysis provides information on the range of costs involved in the delivery of services.

Given the one-size-does-not-fit-all reality and the various cost factor impacts ACDS has researched some key cost factor data.

The age breakdown of the 8,812 of Albertans with developmental disabilities being served by the system is an important cost factor influence as well as the fact as to how they are distributed. Roughly 50% of individuals are in the 18-35 years of age range and the other half fall into the 36 to over 55 year of age range.

Ages

Under 18	14 (.2%)
18-25 years	2,290 (26%)
26-35 years	2,020 (22.9%)
36-45 years	2,064 (23.4%)
46-55 years	1,368 (15.5%)
Over 55	1,056 (12%)

The next incorrect assumption that makes averaging costs inaccurate and misleading is that the individuals are evenly spread throughout the various services provided.

These service needs range from 24/7 fulltime residential staffing to supported home living and access out of home supports like respite. For vocational assistance the services range from community access to employment preparation to employment placement. Then there is a full range of professional supports needs that are required in some cases. Here is a summary of the various types of program areas that are funded and the allocation of the 8,812 adults accessing funding for supports from PDD client population in each area:

3231	36.7%	access overnight staffed residents
1621	18.4%	access support homes
2031	23%	access supported home living
1070	12.1%	access out of home respite
2206	25%	access employment preparation
1604	18.2%	access employment placement
5082	57.7%	access community access
1181	13.4%	access professional support

In an effort to provide a more realistic estimate of client programs service costs, ACDS has calculated the gross costs for distinct service areas. The four service areas that are funded under the PDD granting scheme are:

- A. Community Supports expenditures include the service areas of overnight staffed, support home, supported home living, out of home respite. This is the most expensive service area and has the largest numbers of individuals.
- B. Employment Supports expenditures include the service areas of employment preparation and employment access.
- C. Community Access Supports include the service area of community access and participation supported through sensory stimulation development, physio and occupational therapies, behaviour management and life skills development.

D. Specialized Community Supports include the service area of professional supports and best practice pilot programs.

Here are our calculations for program delivery costs in each service area:

Regional Breakdowns	A. Community Supports	B. Employment Support	C. Community Access Supports	D. Specialized Community Supports
NE	\$9,856M	\$1,906M	\$2,060M	\$534M
NW	\$11,824M	\$1,879M	\$4,079M	\$481M
Edmonton	\$82,127M	\$6,779M	\$15,482M	\$1,338M
Central	\$71,703M	\$3,067M	\$13,354M	\$4,913M
Calgary	\$62,676M	\$7,916M	\$28,794M	\$2,068M
South	\$29,147 M	\$2,501M	\$10,580M	\$393M
Costs of supports ⁶	\$267,333, 000	\$24,048,000	\$74,349,000	\$9,727,000
Service Usage	7,953 people (90.2 %)	3,900 (43.2%)	5,082 (57.7%)	1,181 (13.4%)
Average Cost of Supports	\$33,614	\$6,311	\$14,630	\$8,236

Challenge #7: Governance Models have Eroded the Relationship Between Community Disability Service Providers and the Government

ACDS believes the roles, responsibilities and relationships between stakeholders needs to be revisited.

Any effective governance model must enable those involved in providing services to Albertans with developmental disabilities to govern with integrity and transparency. Fairness in how funds are allocated is an emerging issue; including how costs are incurred and how ends are defined and met throughout the current system. This includes the governance, contracting and reporting functions of the system. The model must shift away from a hierarchical model to a collaborative partnership.

ACDS members are more than prepared to participate in designing a better governance model that uses their expertise and clarifies the relationship the Government of Alberta wants to have with the sector. Service Providers are currently organized into networks or regional Service Provider Councils which align with the six PDD regions. There are also Regional Councils of Board Chairs that represent the service provider governors of volunteer boards and owners of for-profit service providers. The ACDS Board has elected representatives from each of the Regional Service Provider Councils. Community Disability Services has demonstrated a commitment to problem-solving and providing expertise on the emerging trends and models of best practice in the field. Recently it would appear that the PDD Ministry is considering new models of practice (a voucher system) and new contract models with little or no input from the service sector. Service Providers are willing to contribute their knowledge and experience to

⁶ All costs of supports exclude direct operations, supports to delivery systems and board governance costs identified in the Statement of Operations March 31, 2006.

ensure that Government considers all possible impacts, challenges and opportunities when different models of services are considered. Service Providers desire a common outcome of quality services for individuals and accountability as a service sector. A new model of governance that supports collaborative partnerships is critical to all our success.

Challenge #8: The Sector Needs Evidence-based Planning for Outcomes with On-going Assessment, Evaluation and Monitoring

One of the major concerns that are often voiced over the current funding models and decision making processes for determining service levels is the absence of an objective standard of care measurement.

It needs to be noted that there is currently an effective system of Community Disability Service Provider agency review and certification process in place administered province-wide by ACDS on behalf of the Government of Alberta. It was developed in Alberta for Albertans, is reliable, tested, evidence-based and outcome focused. Its quality is in jeopardy, partly because the agency staff resources are not available due, to high staff turnover and staff shortages. Consequently agencies are requesting that certification reviews be deferred and standards of care are no longer being achieved as effectively as in the past. Without the standards being measured, agencies are measured and funded on levels of activity and compliance to formulas versus quality of life outcomes for individuals.

Additionally, support of the use of an assessment system that would assist the professionals in the sector to design and deploy better services and programs for individuals should be encouraged. It could help to determine achievable, acceptable individual outcomes and define the means to evaluate progress and enable better funding allocations. Current practice often only determines the level of need and funding at the time of intake. It ignores changing support requirements, both positive and negative and alternative opportunities over time. A model that allows for regular revisiting of individual support requirements and the adjustment of financial support would improve the services. This would support a system that is fair, accountable, professional and grounded in a best practice systems approach that is cost effective.

Realities and Recommendations

For Alberta's Community Disability Service sector, and for its individuals, the status quo is not an option. Further delays in an adequate response will increase the costs required to restore staffing levels and to retain trained and skilled personnel. This is no longer simply a question of financial cost, it is a moral issue. It is also a legal issue. As the situation stands, we are no longer just managing risk we are facing the prospect of determining whether we are a party to negligence. There could be liability consequences due to not meeting the legal duties of care requirements or the ability to live up to the terms we are required to abide by in our current contractual relationship. Community service providers in this sector are not driven by business practices that provide the option of simply walking away.

The Government of Alberta has a significant responsibility to citizens including those with developmental disabilities. The Government of Alberta currently fulfils this duty of care either directly or through Community Disability Service Providers using contractual arrangements with individuals, groups and organizations throughout the province. Any breach of this duty of care

could be tragic and result in a legal liability that potentially could be extensive against a number of potential defendants, including the province itself.

There are a number of options that are being considered and could be considered in addressing the current and systemic challenges facing the sector.

Reallocation of existing funds is not a sufficient solution to the current problems. If the Government of Alberta directs PDD Boards to reallocate all existing funding, to raise the 'wages funding' portion of grants to Community Disability Service Providers it would be insufficient to close the wage gap with government employees and would not allow for funding of any infrastructure needs or uptake and growth of the system. This has been estimated to cost \$30 million per year over three years to catch up and close the existing compensation gap without considering any additional government wage increases that are currently under negotiation. With recent indications of union wage demands being made on behalf of government employees, this gap will only grow if such unionized wage negotiations settlements become the norm and nothing is done immediately to address the wage gap issue. Closing the gap must not be a one time effort. It must also be sustained before skilled and experienced people will return, be retrained within or even enter the disability service sector in significant numbers. Reallocation of existing funding is not seen by the Community Disability Service sector as a viable solution to the problems.

The Government of Alberta must add more base-funding to the entire developmental disability service sector and ensure funding grants are redeployed, creating a flexible system that allows service providers to create regional solutions to regional wage and service demands. A commitment must be made to move toward a more global outcome based budgeting model which supports the service sector to determine how best to achieve agreed upon objectives. This would recognize the experience and expertise of the service sector to provide innovative and effective services and would recognize and support the real costs and benefits of the current service delivery system. Direct partnership and collaboration with the networks of service provider councils and chairs at the regional and provincial level can provide a forum for problem-solving and development of funding models which align more effectively with funding goals.

If the status quo remains, Community Disability Service Providers by default, may be forced into a position where they must either reduce the number of individuals to fit with current staff levels or lower the level of provided services. The funds realized by reduced services could then be used to pay staff at levels that are competitive in the marketplace.

However, this option has serious implications for the client base and their families; many of the successful employment and community inclusion programs would be lost. Alternatively, direct government run services may have to expand its current operations to ensure services levels and supports are assured. This option will undoubtedly close the wage and benefits gap because all sector workers will become unionized government employees. Cost and outcomes alignment with government objectives would be more direct and easier to control. If there are efficiencies of scale to be realized, a centralized operation run by government would be more efficient in achieving any potential cost savings. However, large scale institutional organizations and standardized bureaucratic approaches will have more difficulty dealing with the sensitivities and the individual concerns of individuals and families. The local community volunteer and other

local community supports for the not-for-profit sector from service clubs and fund raising efforts will be lost if this becomes a totally government run operation.

The current state of affairs cannot continue. The risks to individuals and families cannot be stated emphatically enough. Stress levels created by lack of quality and skilled staff support, limited access to services, staff turnover, service interruptions due to lack of staffing, no respite or family support, housing and transportation issues have increased dramatically. It will only be a matter of time until a serious incident occurs.

If something assertive and aggressive is not done to resolve the community based staffing issues and service levels deteriorate further then other situations and circumstances may take over the policy agenda that could result in harsh legal consequences for all concerned. Other Government systems may become involved by default. In any event, if the Community Disability Service Providers should fail or feel they can no longer assume the liability risk inherent in the current situation, the Government of Alberta will be obliged to assume the responsibility and the increased government level of cost for the individuals in need of care.

Recommendations

The Crisis in Staffing: In relation to Community Disability Service Providers, Alberta should ensure:

1. An immediate injection of additional funds or a sufficient reallocation of current funding to increase staff wages and benefits which will help close the compensation gap and match government staff levels within three years;
2. Government policy will require that community disability staff wages and benefit funding levels will remain congruent with government wages and benefits over time;
3. Legislate the training and the education qualifications required in various service provider staff positions as has recently been done in Day Care
4. Subsidies are made available for training programs, to pay for tuition, books and accommodation costs for students who wish to enter the disability services field, provided they remain working in the Alberta sector for several years after graduation;
5. Support to recruit immigrant workers with appropriate training to work in the sector;
6. An annual review of staffing levels followed by recruitment of the additional service, supervisory and administration staff necessary to meet client population growth and ensure quality of service and quality of life;
7. Annual funding for skills upgrading and professional development for employees at all levels to sustain and improve the quality for service and provide career paths to help employee retention.
8. Continue to support the ACDS Workforce Initiative (Workforce 2010) www.communitydisabilityservices.com and continue to support individual agencies with their innovative strategies.

Governance: Alberta should ensure:

9. Consultation between Community Disability Service Providers and the province takes place prior to any governance, policy, program, legislative or regulatory change in their respective roles, responsibilities and relationships, so that the expertise and practical knowledge of service providers and families can be included in any changes;

10. A comprehensive review of the current governance model for services to persons with developmental disabilities, to ensure sufficiency, fairness and integrity of funding and the equitable and effective distribution of funds to individuals;
11. Community Disability Service Providers have sufficient funding to deliver their contractual obligations on behalf of government and meet their resulting legal responsibilities;
12. Client benefits, in terms of safety, personal security, dignity, inclusion in the community and employment, is a motivating force in developing fair, balanced and reasonable outcomes measures for service providers;
13. Accountability for taxpayer funds.

Governing Philosophy Systemic Solutions: Government and Community Disability Service Providers should ensure:

14. The provision of improved initial client assessments and funding for regular and scheduled assessment updates and reviews, to ensure any amendments, changes and adaptations are appropriate and will achieve client benefits. This will provide accountability for taxpayer funds along with more efficient operations and planning for service provider operators. This change, once achieved, will better enable Community Disability Service Providers to fulfill their legal, ethical and professional responsibilities to their individuals on an on-going basis;
15. Clarity and consistency in the expected outcomes of the disability service sector system by defining roles and responsibilities for each party to ensure a comprehensive, coordinated approach that is aligned to the stated government principles in the Government of Alberta's business plan outcomes;
16. Provide longer term funding commitments to service providers of at least three years duration so more efficiencies can be realized through longer range planning;
17. Incorporate cost of living factor increases into the annual Government of Alberta budgeting cycle for PDD and contractual relationships with Community Disability Service Providers.
18. The role and mandate of PDD needs to be clear and well understood by all, and the current confusion about roles and relationships need to be clarified. For example is the PDD – Community Disability Service Provider relationship one of an agency to do what it's told or rather an independent contractor with the province having skills, knowledge and expertise to design, decide and provide a client service program?



Alberta Council of Disability Services
Bay 19, 3220 – 5 Avenue NE
Calgary, AB T2A 5N1
(403) 250-9495
www.acds.ca

Email: acds@acds.ca