

# Workforce Profile and Employer Perspectives: Service Provider Survey

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

April 2005

The vision of Workforce 2010 is to have a responsive and sustainable workforce to support persons with disabilities in Alberta. As part of the Workforce 2010 initiative, the Alberta Association of Rehabilitation Centres (AARC) commissioned The Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute (VRRRI) to undertake multiple intelligence gathering strategies, including a survey of community-based rehabilitation employers providing services to persons with developmental disabilities in Alberta.

### **Methodology**

**Sample and data collection** The survey instrument, developed in consultation with the Workforce 2010 Steering Committee, was mailed to all community-based agencies funded by Person with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) to provide services to adults with developmental disabilities in Alberta, based on a sampling frame provided by PDD regional boards. Of the 176 agencies in the sample, 28 also received funding from Family Supports for Children with Disabilities (FSCD; previously known as Resources for Children with Disabilities) through Alberta Children's Services. Data collection occurred from October 19, 2004 to January 14, 2005.

**Data quality and limitations** Based on the overall response rate (43.2%) and the variability in service providers, it appears that the sample is representative, and findings may be generalized to PDD-funded service providers across the province. However, potential self-selection bias due to unknown factors may be present. As well, generalizability is limited for questions with large amounts of missing data. Data on FSCD-funded employees is only generalizable to those working in PDD-funded agencies.

Respondents provided "best guesses" rather than accurate numbers for some questions, and there is a potential inflation in the number of employees reported due to overlap in staffing across agencies. For these reasons, statistical tests of significance were not conducted, and percentage distributions rather than actual numbers should be used for interpreting the data.

The results should be treated as exploratory, recognizing that this is the first survey of its kind for the rehabilitation field in Alberta. The data is sufficiently valid to paint a broad picture of the current and future trends in the industry's workforce—an area which has hitherto relied mostly on anecdotal information.

### **Sample Demographics**

76 respondents (43.2%) returned the survey, providing information for 70 unique organizations representing 83 service locations. Regional response rates were as follows: Calgary (46.5%), Central (40.5%), Edmonton (39.0%), Northeast (46.2%), Northwest (50.0%) and South (42.9%).

- The sample employs 7,446 employees and provides services to 4,877 adults and 761 children with disabilities (numbers potentially inflated due to overlap across agencies).
- 69 organizations provided information about their operating model, distributed as follows: not-for-profit societies (81.2%), not-for-profit businesses (8.7%) and for-profit organizations (10.1%); 92.8% were not unionized and 7.2% were fully or partially unionized.
- 69 organizations (98.6%) receive PDD funding to provide services to adults with developmental disabilities; of these, 48 serve only adults and 21 serve adults and children.
- 22 organizations (31.4%) receive FSCD funding to provide services to children with developmental disabilities; 21 serve adults and children, and one serves only children.

- Services are located in all PDD and FSCD regions (except Métis Settlements), and are distributed across diverse settings: in places with over 100,000 people, 37.3%; places with 50,001-100,000 people, 15.7%; places with 10,001-50,000 people, 17.6%; places with 10,000 people or less, 31.4%.

### Provincial Workforce

Respondents were requested to provide demographic information on their current PDD-funded and/or FSCD-funded workforce, defined as “everyone in your organization who is funded by PDD and/or FSCD to provide services to persons with disabilities.” The definition included all direct service workers, administrative support, supervisory and managerial staff; full-time, part-time, temporary, variable, relief and casual staff; and, people employed or contracted for services such as supportive room-mates or neighbours, support home providers, contract job coaches and others providing proprietor-based services.

#### Total employees

- The sample reported a total of 7,446 employees, of which 72.7% (5,413) are funded by PDD only, 8.4% (623) by FSCD only and 7.0% (526) by both PDD and FSCD. Thus, the data is based on 5,939 PDD-funded and 1,149 FSCD-funded employees. Because of potential inflation in these numbers due to overlap in staffing across agencies, it may be more accurate to think of these as number of *positions* rather than number of *people* providing services.
- Population estimates based on extrapolation suggest there could be as many as 13,600 PDD-funded and 2,630 FSCD-funded positions in community-based PDD-funded services in Alberta.

#### Regional distribution

- PDD-funded employees: Calgary, 23.6%; Central, 22.3%; Edmonton, 25.7%; Northeast, 5.3%; Northwest, 4.6%; South, 8.4%; and, 10.1% in organizations across multiple regions. This distribution is slightly different from the regional distribution of individuals receiving services. Part of the discrepancy could be due to the amalgamation of data from organizations serving multiple regions.
- FSCD-funded employees: Calgary, 7.6%; Central, 45.3%; East Central, 0.6%; North Central, 3.6%; Edmonton, 16.4%; Northeast, 0.8%; Northwest, 4.6%; Southeast, 2.7%; Southwest, 1.0%; and, 17.5% in organizations across multiple regions.

#### Gender distribution

- PDD-funded employees: Females, 82.6%; males, 16.5%. (n=5,888; missing=0.9%)
- FSCD-funded employees: Females, 81.9%; males, 18.1%. (n=1,149; missing=0%)

#### Age distribution

- The largest proportion of workers are 26-35 years old. FSCD-funded employees appear to be slightly younger than PDD-funded employees, with a greater proportion 25 years or younger (FSCD, 25.1%; PDD, 16.1%) and a lower proportion 36-55 years old (FSCD, 35.3%; PDD, 44.2%).
- PDD-funded employees: Under 18 years, 0.1%; 18-25 years 16.0%; 26-35 years, 26.8%; 36-45 years, 24.4%, 46-55 years, 19.8%; over 55 years, 8.7%. (n=5,690; missing=4.2%)
- FSCD-funded employees: Under 18 years, 0.8%; 18-25 years 24.3%; 26-35 years, 28.1%; 36-45 years, 18.6%, 46-55 years, 16.7%; over 55 years, 11.4%. (n=1,149; missing=0%)
- There is some evidence of a bimodal distribution in the PDD-funded workforce, with people aged 36-45 years relatively fewer than those younger than 35 or older than 45. This could have implications with respect to leadership development and succession planning.

#### Distribution by position

- The predominant employees are direct service workers. Compared to PDD-funded employees, there is a higher proportion of FSCD-funded administrative support workers and professional support staff.
- PDD-funded employees: Administrative support, 4.1%; direct service workers, 79.9%; front-line supervisors/coordinators/program managers, 10.1%; professional support, 0.9%; senior management, 2.2%. (n=5,773; missing=2.8%)
- FSCD-funded employees: Administrative support, 6.1%; direct service workers, 77.6%; front-line supervisors/coordinators/program managers, 9.5%; professional support, 1.9%; senior management, 1.9%. (n=1,114; missing=3.0%)

#### Distribution by job status/hours of work

- Permanent workers are predominant, however, compared to PDD-funded employees, there is a higher proportion of FSCD-funded variable/casual/on-call workers and fewer permanent workers.
- PDD-funded employees: Permanent full-time, 52.9%; permanent part-time, 28.7%; term full-time, 1.0%; term part-time, 0.7%; variable/casual/on-call, 15.1%. (n=5,839; missing=1.7%)
- FSCD-funded employees: Permanent full-time, 41.8%; permanent part-time, 30.4%; term full-time, 0.2%; term part-time, 0%; variable/casual/on-call, 24.3%. (n=1,110; missing=3.4%)

#### Distribution by highest education level attained

- Data for this variable was missing for a large portion of employees (PDD, 31.5%; FSCD, 58.2%). The largest proportion of people are those whose highest education level is a high school diploma, followed by those with a college diploma.
- PDD-funded employees: Less than high school, 1.7%; high school diploma, 26.0%; some college or university, 12.9%; college diploma, 15.4%; university degree (Bachelor's), 11.2%; post-graduate training, 1.3%. (n=4,067; missing=31.5%)
- FSCD-funded employees: Less than high school, 0.4%; high school diploma, 19.0%; some college or university, 6.1%; college diploma, 8.4%; university degree (Bachelor's), 6.1%; post-graduate training, 1.9%. (n=1,100; missing=58.2%)

### **Regional Differences**

Regional differences were analyzed for both PDD and FSCD sub-samples, with FSCD regions collapsed into their nearest PDD equivalents. Percentages were calculated out of valid numbers (i.e., not including missing cases); overall totals may differ from provincial information in previous section. The FSCD-funded samples from Northeast (12), Northwest (54) and South (40) are too low for meaningful interpretations; their results are not reported here but are in the main survey report for those who are interested.

#### Gender distribution

- PDD-funded employees (n=5,888; missing=0.9%)
  - The overall workforce is about 83% female and 17% male.
  - Calgary (21.3%), South (17.9%), Northeast (17.1%) and organizations serving multiple regions (17.1%) have higher proportions of males. Central (12.5%), Edmonton (14.6%) and Northwest (14.7%) have fewer males.
- FSCD-funded employees (n=1,149; missing=0%)
  - The overall workforce is 82% female and 18% male.
  - Organizations serving multiple regions have the largest proportion of males (36.7%); Edmonton (10.8%) has the lowest; Calgary (13.4%) and Central (13.5%) have similar gender distributions.

#### Age distribution

- PDD-funded employees (n=5,690; missing=4.2%)
  - Overall, the highest percentage of workers are 26-35 years (27.9%), followed by those 36-45 years (25.5%) and 46-55 years (20.7%).
  - Central region appears to have a slightly older workforce, with the highest proportion aged 36-45 years (26.0%), and a higher than average proportion aged over 55 (Central, 11.8%; overall, 9.1%). South also has a slightly higher percentage of workers aged 36-45 years (27.0%) compared to those 26-35 years (24.5%). Northwest has a fairly obvious bimodal distribution, with the highest proportion aged 36-45 years (32.0%), followed by those 18-25 years (22.3%).
- FSCD-funded employees (n=1,149; missing=0%)
  - The highest percentage of workers are 26-35 years (28.1%), followed by 18-25 years (24.3%).
  - Edmonton appears to have the youngest workforce with 50.0% aged 25 years or younger (cf. 25.1% overall), and a lower proportion aged over 45 years (Edmonton, 16.9%; overall 28.1%). In contrast, Central has the lowest proportion 25 years or younger (17.2%) and a much higher proportion over 45 years (30.2%). Organizations serving multiple regions show a bimodal distribution, peaking at 26-35 years (32.8%) and at over 55 years (19.9%).

#### Distribution by position

- PDD-funded employees (n=5,773; missing=2.8%)
  - Overall, the highest percentage are in direct service positions (82.2%), followed by front-line supervisors/coordinators/program managers (10.4%), administrative staff (4.2%) and senior management (2.3%). There are no notable differences across regions in this trend.
- FSCD-funded employees (n=1,114; missing=3.0%)
  - Overall, direct service workers form 80.1% of the sample, followed by front-line supervisors, coordinators or program managers (9.6%) and administrative staff (6.3%).
  - Calgary has the highest proportion of direct service staff (92.8%) and a lower proportion of administrative support (2.1%) and front-line supervision staff (3.1%). In contrast, Central has a much higher proportion of front-line supervision staff (12.2%). Edmonton has a higher proportion of administrative support staff (Edmonton, 8.8%; overall 6.3%) than front-line supervisory staff (Edmonton, 6.1%; overall 9.6%), as do organizations serving multiple regions (13.3% administrative support staff compared to 8.6% front-line supervision staff).

#### Distribution by job status/hours of work

- PDD-funded employees (n=5,778; missing=2.7%)
  - The largest proportion in all regions are permanent, full-time workers (54.3% overall, ranging from 48.3% in Calgary to 69.1% in Northwest), followed by permanent, part-time workers (29.5% overall) and people who are employed on variable/casual/on-call terms (14.5% overall).
  - In Northeast and in organizations serving multiple regions, the proportions of variable/casual/on-call workers exceed permanent, part-time workers by a small margin. Both these geographic categories have the lowest proportions of permanent, part-time workers (Northeast, 19.1%; organizations serving multiple regions, 20.8%; overall, 29.5%), while Calgary (35.1%) has the highest, followed by Central (34.4%).
  - There is great variation across regions in the proportions of variable/casual/on-call workers, ranging from 24.3% in organizations serving multiple regions and 20.9% in Northeast to 2.9% in Northwest. We are not sure if this finding is an artifact of the small sample size (4-6 respondents each), or whether it is indeed reflective of regional practices.
- FSCD-funded employees (n=1,110; missing=3.4%)
  - Overall, the majority are employed on a permanent, full-time basis (43.2%), followed by those employed on a permanent, part-time basis (31.4%).
  - However, the largest proportion of workers in Calgary (83.5%) are employed on a permanent, part-time basis, while the largest proportion in Edmonton (77.7%) are variable/casual/on-call.

#### Distribution by highest level of education attained

- In both sub-samples, the largest proportions of workers hold a high school diploma (PDD, 37.9%; FSCD, 45.7%), followed by those with a college diploma (PDD, 22.67%; FSCD, 20.2%).
- PDD-funded employees (n=4,067; missing=31.5%)
  - Exceptions to the general overall pattern include: organizations serving multiple regions, where university graduates constitute the largest category (34.3%); Edmonton, where the largest category is of those holding college diplomas (32.9%); and, Calgary, where the second largest category is not those with college diplomas, but with Bachelor's degrees (21.0%).
  - Calgary (25.0%) and Edmonton (19.8%) have the highest proportion of degree.
- FSCD-funded employees (n=481; missing=58.1%): Regional numbers too small to interpret.

#### **Differences by Age Groups**

The survey requested information on age-level differences in employee demographic characteristics in order to help understand how the workforce in PDD-funded services might change over time. Unfortunately there was a large number of missing cases; of those who did respond, many provided best estimates rather than accurate numbers. Thus, the results are not generalizable; however, they do paint a rough picture of age-level differences at least for the sample reported.

#### Gender distribution

- PDD-funded employees (n=4,688; missing=21.1%)

- The gender difference is greatest for those 36-45 years (14.7% male; 85.3% female) and lowest for those 46-55 years (19.8% male; 81.1% female). The greatest proportion of men in the sample are 26-35 years (25.6%), followed by those who are 46-55 years (24.0%); the greatest proportion of women are 26-35 years (28.0%), followed by those who are 36-45 years (25.9%).
- FSCD-funded employees (n=649; missing=43.5%)
  - The gender difference is greatest for people under 26 (9.0% male, 91.0% female), and lowest for those over 55 (20.3% male, 79.7% female). The highest proportion of men are 26-35 years (25.6%) followed by those who are 46-55 years. The highest proportion of women are also 26-35 years (27.9%), followed by those who are under 26 years (23.2%).

#### Distribution by position

- PDD-funded employees (n=4,466; missing=21.1%)
  - Direct service workers are the predominant group, ranging from 76.1% of workers 36-45 years to 93.8% of those less than 26 years. Almost half the direct service workers (48.8%) are less than 36 years old; however, 80.3% of people over 55 years are also direct service workers.
  - Over half the front-line supervisors/coordinators/ program managers (59.5%) are 36-55 years old, and range from 3.7% of workers under 26 years to 15.3% of workers 36-45 years.
  - The distribution of senior managers rises steadily with age, ranging from less than 1% of those under 36 years to 5.2% of those over 55 years.
  - Administrative support staff range from 2.0% of those under 26 years to 6.3% of those 46-55 years and 6.0% of those over 55. There is no age-related trend in professional support staff.
- FSCD-funded employees (n=611; missing=53.2%)
  - Direct service workers range from 78.4% of people 26-35 years to 94.7% of those under 26 years; half these workers (50.8%) are under 36 years.
  - The bulk of front-line supervisors/coordinators/program managers (69.2%) are 26-45 years old, ranging from 6.2% of those who are under 26 or over 55 years, to 15.0% of those 36-45 years.
  - All senior managers reported are 36-55 years.
  - People in administrative support positions range from 0.8% of those under 26 years to 10.8% of those over 55 years; people providing professional supports are concentrated in the 26-35 years category (50.0%), followed by those who are 46-55 years (21.4%).

#### Distribution by job status/hours of work

- PDD-funded employees (n=4,187; missing=29.5%)
  - Over half the workers in the sample are employed on a permanent, full-time basis, and range from 47.3% of those under 26 years to 61.2% of those 36-45 years. These are followed by permanent, part-time workers, who constitute 30.6% of workers aged under 26.
  - Variable/casual/on-call workers range from 11.5% of people aged 36-45 years to 21.2% of those under 26 years. Over half the people in these positions (58.0%) are under 36.
- FSCD-funded employees (n=610; missing=53.1%)
  - Permanent, full-time workers range from 22.0% of those under 26 to 59.4% of those over 55. In contrast, permanent, part-time workers are 44.9% of the sample under 26, compared to only 23.4% of those over 55. The number of permanent, part-time people steadily decreases with age.
  - People employed on a variable/casual/on-call basis are most likely to be under 26 years old, where they form 33.1% of the people in that age group.

#### Distribution by highest level of education attained

- PDD-funded employees (n=3,104; missing=47.7%)
  - People with a high school diploma range from 31.4% of those who are 26 to 35 years to 55.0% of those who are over 55.
  - There is an inverse relationship between age and the proportion of people who have some college or university training, ranging from 23.6% of those under 26 years to 10.5% of those over 55.
  - A quarter of the sample (25.4%) holds a college diploma, constituting from 15.3% of the workforce over 55 years to 28.7% of the workforce 26-35 years.

- People holding a Bachelor's degree (without any higher academic training) range from 9.2% of those over 55 years to 16.4% of people aged 26-35 years.
  - There is a direct relationship between age and the proportion of people with post-graduate training, ranging from none under 26 years to 3.9% of those over 55 years.
- FSCD-funded employees (n=144; missing=87.5%): Sample too small to interpret.

### **Employers' Perspectives and Practices**

Workforce challenges, issues and trends Two issues raised most frequently were (i) lack of adequate funding and (ii) acute shortage of qualified workers. Both are crucial given the recent trends that are expected to continue for the foreseeable future.

Demographic trends observed in the workforce include (i) an increasingly culturally diverse workforce, (ii) more male applicants, (iii) more older applicants, and (iv) more people with lower academic qualifications. While some of these trends are positive (e.g., attracting individuals who are currently not well represented in the rehabilitation workforce), they also bring with them some challenges (e.g., communication barriers, and lack of formal knowledge and experience in rehabilitation services).

Demographic trends observed and expected in individuals receiving services include (i) an increase in older people, people with complex needs, FAS and dual diagnosis, (ii) a greater diversity in disabilities and ethnic backgrounds, (iii) a greater involvement from families in service planning, (iv) higher expectations for quality standards, and (v) more families and individuals becoming increasingly vocal in advocating for quality standards and government accountability.

In response to these expectations, employers feel that direct service staff will need to be more educated, specialized, and have a diverse range of skills such as communication, conflict management, advocacy, partnership-building and knowledge of community resources. The role of direct service staff will need to evolve into that of facilitator, connector and ambassador. As well, post-secondary institutions will need to prepare students better than they are currently doing for the changing realities of rehabilitation services.

Staff recruitment and retention Employers overwhelmingly attributed the recruitment and retention challenges faced by the field to inadequate compensation for the skills, responsibilities and demands of the work—especially for direct service positions which were seen as being the most stressful. The perspective of the field as a devalued service, coupled with the failure to recognize rehabilitation work as a profession contribute to the recruitment crisis especially during the current labour shortage. More people were seen as leaving their jobs for other industries (e.g., education, nursing, other health services and the oil and gas sector) rather than for work in other agencies within the field.

Solutions to these problems include (i) increased compensation, (ii) more job flexibility, (iii) better promotion of the field as a valued service to society, (iv) development of a professional association, and (v) creation of learning and advancement opportunities so that people perceive the work as a career rather than just a job. As the primary funder, PDD was seen as playing a central role in providing the support and resources to enable these strategies to occur.

Staff development and training Employers identified a broad range of areas where staff training is required, including basic skills training, specific medical disorders, community inclusion, relationship building and leadership development. People agreed that staff coming into the field need to be better trained and ongoing staff development opportunities need to be improved. Inadequate funding, lack of time, shortage of relief staff and high turnover were all seen as barriers to effective staff development.

Employers are finding creative ways to overcome these barriers through partnerships, job shadowing opportunities and drawing on in-house expertise. Most employers are raising their own funds to achieve staff training goals, but there is a recognition that these resources can only go so far.

Human resource practices for the future To provide effective services in the near future, employers felt that improvements were needed in a range of areas including (i) adequate compensation, (ii) training and advancement opportunities, (iii) flexibility both within the agency and between PDD and service providers, (iv) resources (such as, access to technology, administrative supports, research and information on best practices and professional expertise in human resources), and (v) an improved image and profile in the community at large.

Only a few service providers felt that their organizations were well prepared to provide effective services in the future. The majority felt they had a lot of the pre-requisites, but that lack of funding remained a critical barrier preventing them from being truly effective. In addition to funding, people felt they could be effective employers and service providers if there was improved and transparent relationship with PDD, with PDD focusing on its role of ensuring stability and consistency for the field rather than micro-managing agencies.

People emphasized that the issues voiced in this survey were not new, and that many employers had demonstrated their creativity in meeting these challenges despite lack of adequate government resources.

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There was a strong consensus that the growing labour shortage in the province had made human resource issues more acute than ever before. Increased funding, resources and flexibility from the government were critical if the rehabilitation field was to be competitive over the next 5 to 10 years. Without this support, most employers felt that many community-based services would not be equipped to handle what may soon become insurmountable challenges.

**Conclusion**

The information gathered through this survey paints the first ever demographic picture of the workforce in community-based PDD-funded services across Alberta. Despite some quantitative limitations, the survey provides the first critical step toward a broad understanding of the workforce distribution, and toward effective human resource planning and policy development. Supplementing the quantitative data are the rich perspectives, insights and practices of service providers who face and overcome human resource challenges in the rehabilitation field on a daily basis; challenges that are expected to become even more urgent in the current climate of Alberta's increasing labour shortage.

The comprehensive series of activities being undertaken by Workforce 2010 should enable service providers to become better equipped with the necessary intelligence and tools to position themselves as competitive employers. It is clear, however, that the human resource challenges confronting the rehabilitation field are not unique to the industry, but shared, to varying degrees, by all human services in Alberta. Service providers have identified a number of solutions to current and imminent challenges, and many are implementing a variety of "best practices" to remain valued employers. However, despite their dedication and efforts, only a few feel adequately prepared to provide quality services in the future.

Effective and long-term solutions will require solid commitment and partnerships among all rehabilitation stakeholders, and with all other human services and the community at large. As repeatedly urged by the respondents to this survey, no amount of information or employer creativity will be sufficient unless coupled with adequate compensation formulae, increased resources and flexibility, and a consolidated effort to change the devalued perception of the field—which includes establishing a professional designation for rehabilitation work. More than ever before, PDD Provincial and Regional Boards, AARC, individual service providers, family members and self-advocates will have to work together in partnership to achieve the vision set forth by Workforce 2010.