

# Maximizing Impact through Respectful Relationships

## About Community Disability Services

Community disability service organizations are vital partners with the Government of Alberta in the delivery of supports to facilitate the citizenship of individuals with developmental disabilities.

Funded by the Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) program, community-based organizations provide adults with developmental disabilities with home living, employment, community access, and specialised supports in their local communities. PDD also funds government-run operations, and provides funding to families to manage their own supports through Family Managed Services (FMS). Some families choose to contract with community disability service organizations to provide necessary professional supports to their family member.

### In 2017-18:

- **12,061** Albertans received supports and services from the PDD program<sup>1</sup>
- About **9,000** individuals (**70% - 75%**) receive supports from **157** community disability service providers<sup>2</sup>
- **157** community service organizations provided supports across Alberta<sup>1</sup>
- **15,000** workers were employed by community disability service organizations<sup>3</sup>
- **\$900 million** supported community service delivery (service provider contracts, FMS, PDD program/regional offices), and \$47 million for direct operations, for a total operating cost of \$947 million<sup>4</sup>

## Our Vision and Framework for Impact

Our vision for vibrant communities is places where all citizens feel safe, healthy, connected, and valued. Community disability services provide essential, personalized supports to Albertans with disabilities to facilitate their full potential for citizenship. The capacity of community disability services to have maximum impact rests on three pillars; these pillars are the guiding principles for our recommendations to the Government of Alberta to maximize the impact of community disability supports. One of these guiding principles is **respectful relationships** between government and contracted community disability service organizations.





## A historical partnership in an uneven landscape

The partnership between the government and community disability service organizations in Alberta dates to the 1970s as structures and policies were developed to support the deinstitutionalization of individuals with disabilities. This period was characterized by significant collaboration between policy makers, program administrators, community agencies and families. All worked toward a single purpose and vision.

Since the 1990s, the relationship has become largely transactional and prescriptive, reflecting its contractor-vendor aspect than its origins as a true partnership.<sup>5</sup> However, even as this relational shift has occurred, there have been examples of structures and processes to facilitate collaboration, some which have had some impact, and many which have led to little change. The result is an uneven landscape, with the potential for opportunities, but also the reality of persistent barriers to meaningful engagement.<sup>5</sup>

### The issues

**Lack of a common and overarching vision.** Although the PDD program states as its mission: “to support adults with developmental disabilities to be included in community life and to be as independent as possible,” there is no articulation of what exactly that looks like, and what fundamental values underpin this vision. In the daily lives of service providers, this manifests as inconsistencies in processes, confusion around goals and outcomes, and ever-shifting accountability requirements.

**Lack of meaningful engagement.** In some regions, communication between agencies and government is absent, infrequent, or involves people without decision-making authority. In other regions, service providers are informed of changes and developments, but have little direction or support to address the resulting implications or issues. In many instances, service providers feel that agendas are set and conversations are driven by government and its needs rather than by individuals or those responsible for supporting them.

**Lack of transparency and information.** Service providers do not have access to accurate data about individuals in services or on waitlists, or demographic projections of people expected to need supports in the future, thus restricting their ability to plan. There also appears to be a lack of full disclosure in some instances when individuals, especially those with very complex needs, move across service providers.

**Regional inconsistencies in contracting processes and expectations.** Regional differences in how contracts are awarded, what costs are included, how these are calculated, and outcomes and reporting standards have created a contracting process that is “convoluted and cumbersome.”

### Recommendations for maximizing impact through respectful relationships

The partnership between government and contracted agencies thrives when it is built on a common vision, shared values, and trust. **To maximize respectful relationships, we recommend the government:**

- **Articulate a shared vision**, common values, and a cohesive plan for quality supports in collaboration with individuals, families, community disability service providers, and related stakeholders to achieve the full citizenship of individuals with disabilities.
- **Establish permanent forums** for ongoing dialogue between government, ACDS and community disability service providers, individuals and families to inform planning, policy development, issue identification and resolution.
- **Draft a Disability Services Charter of Engagement** in collaboration with ACDS. The charter should include a common vision and principles, well-defined rules of engagement, commitment to transparency, and a clear statement of the distribution of roles and responsibilities.
- **Provide full access on the government’s open data portal** to accurate and comprehensive information related to the PDD program, including demographic projections, service usage, waitlists, funding, and regional profiles.
- **Develop a framework for consistent contracting processes** in collaboration with community disability service providers that includes transparent funding formulas, clear budgeting approaches, and streamlined reporting and evaluation protocols. The core aspects of such a framework were already identified by the Agency and Human Services Procurement Advisory Table in 2016.

#### Sources

1. PDD Program Review Discussion Guide. 2018
2. Estimated from: Alberta Community and Social Services. “PDD by the Numbers” webpage. Last updated October 4, 2016
3. Estimated from ACDS 2017 Annual Workforce Survey
4. Alberta Ministry of Community and Social Services. Annual Report 2017-18. Voted Actuals
5. Sonpal-Valias, N. 2016. Doctoral dissertation. University of Calgary

<b>Vision</b>	People with disabilities live full lives as citizens supported by a vibrant network of services in their communities
<b>Mission</b>	ACDS is the collective voice of our members, advancing excellence and best practices, advocating for effective public policy, and championing disability services