

# Vision and Impact Framework

## 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 specialized 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), with an additional \$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.





## GUIDING PRINCIPLE 1: RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS

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### 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 values underpin this vision. This manifests as inconsistencies in processes, confusion around goals and outcomes, and 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 what outcomes and reporting standards are expected have created a 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.



## GUIDING PRINCIPLE 2: PRUDENT INVESTMENT

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### Social and economic benefits of the sector

Investment in community disability services has high returns. Resources spent on community-based supports enable people to receive services in locations surrounded by familiar and reliable networks. They strengthen the social fabric of the community, increase services for all residents, generate employment, and divert funds from costly systems such as hospitals and correctional facilities. Even a small reallocation of public spending from health to social services results in significantly improved population health outcomes.<sup>6</sup>

### The issues

**Funding to community disability service organizations has not kept pace** with inflation, recognized other economic pressures, or addressed the costs of providing services to individuals with increasingly complex needs. This is despite significant increases to the PDD program over time.

**Administrative budgets have not increased since 2008.** Contracts have not considered the rising costs of running sound and sustainable organizations, and the indirect costs of providing quality supports. These include time and costs associated with submitting service proposals, getting to know individuals, consulting specialists and professionals, developing community relationships, arranging service review meetings, and navigating bureaucratic processes for changing services.

**Contracts have not provided any wage increases since 2014.** Staff compensation has been below market value for a long time compared to similar jobs such as nursing, homecare and teaching aides, creating ongoing recruitment and retention challenges. Turnover in frontline positions is over 30%.<sup>7</sup>

**Most post-secondary disability programs have been discontinued.** Many new staff need training in some of the basic skills, including mandatory training and specialised training in complex supports. Training budgets are highly inadequate, and access to training varies greatly across the province.

**Increased safety risks.** Low compensation has created a vicious cycle of recruiting untrained and inexperienced workers, providing core training, and then losing these staff to higher paying jobs. Under-qualified staff can result in poor support, or create a safety risk for individuals, staff and public.

**Accountability pressures have increased significantly.** Prescriptive oversight and paperwork overload have become the norm in service delivery, creating burdens and diverting resources from achieving service outcomes, planning quality services, innovating, or investing in professional development.

**Innovations are not actively supported.** Despite numerous initiatives in the past to test innovative service models and new concepts, there has been no support for wide-scale implementation of successful projects, or for sharing knowledge and learnings from these projects more broadly.

### Recommendations for maximizing impact through prudent investment

Investing in community disability services benefits the individuals receiving services, strengthens communities, and contributes to the provincial economy. **To maximise this investment, we recommend the government:**

- **Establish a flexible, responsive funding model** that provides predictability and sustainability through contracts that: are spread over at least 3 years; are indexed to inflation; incorporate all administrative and indirect costs associated with providing quality supports (true cost of service); and, allow service providers the flexibility to re-allocate funds to accommodate the changing needs of the individuals receiving supports.
- **Set aside annual innovation funding** dedicated to support community disability service providers to pilot, evaluate, share, and scale up innovative, successful service models and approaches.
- **Create a comprehensive human resource strategy** in collaboration with community disability services and post-secondary institutions. The strategy should include adequate and sustainable funding for staff compensation, training, and professional standards designation applicable to all community disability workers regardless of employment context (service providers and FMS).

## GUIDING PRINCIPLE 3: SEAMLESS AND INTEGRATED SYSTEMS



### Changing context

Like all Albertans, people with disabilities are impacted by a wide range of programs, services, and systems such as income supports, health, justice, housing and seniors, to name a few. The scope of supports that agencies need to provide has expanded as individuals with disabilities are living longer and participating in the community in more diverse ways. In addition, many individuals with disabilities receiving community-based supports have complex, and in some cases increasingly ultra-complex, behavioural and medical support needs.

### The issues

**PDD eligibility criteria.** Different programs have different criteria and approaches. Individuals eligible for supports under Family Supports for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) program may suddenly lose them the day they turn 18 years of age. If a person is eligible for PDD but also needs mental health supports, accessing the latter is not automatic. When programs operate in silos, navigating these become challenging, resource intensive, and may create a crisis for the individual and potential risk in the community. Most community disability service providers favour broadening the eligibility criteria, provided that services are properly resourced to meet added responsibilities and scope of needs.

**The parallel system.** For individuals with complex needs, the intersections with certain systems and policy areas are more frequent, intense, and demanding than most other individuals in service. The costs of these transactional interactions are largely borne by PDD. As the number of people with complex and ultra-complex needs increases, the cost of this parallel system keeps burgeoning. Furthermore, several supports that should be available to people with disabilities through existing programs are being provided by duplicate processes within PDD, creating, in effect, a “parallel system.” There is a risk of potential financial inefficiency, or even gaps if one system believes the other is covering off responsibilities.

**Inconsistencies and incongruencies.** Although many social service programs are under the Ministry of Community and Social Services, there are significant differences across departments. Interactions between departments are often incongruent, with each having its own access criteria, processes, and service protocols. Many programs have been designed without intentional consideration of their impact on individuals with disabilities. Individuals receiving supports may experience these programs in different ways than what they are accustomed to, or what might be optimal for their needs.

### Recommendations for maximizing impact through seamless, integrated systems

The lives of individuals with disabilities intersect with multiple programs, services, and policy areas.

#### To maximise the opportunities created by these connections, we recommend the government:

- **Expand the eligibility criteria for PDD programs** to include individuals who may otherwise fall through the cracks, including those transitioning from Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD), provide broader access to services, and widen the involvement of people who know the individual in the assessment process. Expansion to the criteria must be accompanied with proper resources to community agencies, including enhanced funding for staff training, to address increased demands.
- **Review programs and systems access** to address the overlap between PDD and other systems and programs, and the barriers and inconsistencies in access criteria and approaches by ensuring people with development disabilities can access appropriate systems outside PDD, consistent with other Albertans.
- **Conduct a disability-based analysis** to review government policies, programs, and initiatives to assess and address their potential impact on individuals with disabilities in the same way that the government has committed to conduct analysis of its policies, programs and processes for other frequently impacted groups.

#### 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
6. Dutton et al. 2018. CMAJ January 22; 190:E66-71. doi: 10.1503/cmaj.170132
7. ACDS 2017 Annual Workforce Survey

<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