



ACDS 2020 Annual Conference  
Innovate, Collaborate, Elevate  
Realize the Possibilities

# Conference Backgrounder

## Alberta Council of Disability Services (ACDS) 2020 Annual Conference

**Dates:** September 22-23, 2020

**Venue:** Delta Hotels by Marriott Edmonton South Conference Centre, Edmonton, AB

**Conference Theme:** *Innovate, Collaborate, Elevate: Realize the Possibilities*

**About the Theme:** The theme is driven by the recognition that the Community Disability Services (CDS) sector in Alberta has tremendous capacity to strengthen and elevate, through strategies such as innovation and collaboration. Now, more-than-ever—in the context of the current economic climate and ongoing workforce and funding challenges—we must look to the existing potential of the sector to help realize the possibilities to advance the sector.

**Conference Value Statement:** The 2020 conference will identify and explore the existing and potential capacity of the Community Disability Services sector to strengthen and elevate the sector through innovation, collaboration, and other strategies.

It will also assist organizational leaders to think strategically about the capacity and potential of their organizations to address current issues and advance their services to ensure quality supports to people with developmental disabilities.

Our conference goal is to provide a strong learning experience that focuses on sharing knowledge and expertise from a range of speakers and presenters with concurrent sessions customized to leadership (executives and senior management), middle-management and front-line staff.

**Conference Participants:** Up to 450 delegates are expected to attend, including front-line staff, managers and executives from the CDS sector primarily in Alberta.

**Conference Format:** Plenary sessions will be targeted to all participants. Concurrent sessions will be offered in two streams: a leadership and general stream. Sessions in the leadership stream will include learning and workshop opportunities for sector leaders to engage together in developing innovative responses to challenges. These sessions will be restricted to senior leadership of organizations.



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## What Challenges Do We Need to Address?

**Our workforce:** Low wages and demanding work have made the CDS sector less attractive to students preparing for the workforce. Most post-secondary institutions in Alberta have stopped offering certificate or degree programs in community disability services due to low student enrollment. Service providers have few qualified young people to recruit as experienced ones retire or shrink their work roles. When new staff are hired, many often need training in some of the most basic skills needed to work in this sector.

As the scope of services has expanded to include an increasing number of aging individuals and individuals with multiple and complex needs, so has the need for highly-skilled staff. In addition, turnover due to retirement of senior leadership is accelerating with impacts to organizational and practice knowledge and creates the need to equip and support new leadership. ***What current practices, innovations, and collaborations can we engage in to advance the workforce?***

**Our capacity to respond to changing demographics:** Advances in medicine have resulted in increased viability of premature babies, who are at higher risk of having an intellectual or developmental disability. As well, medical advancements have increased the life span of persons with developmental disabilities necessitating increased senior care services. During Alberta's economic boom, many parents moved to Alberta to take advantage of resources available to children with special needs. Many of those children are at the age of transitioning to adult services now and those transitions need extensive planning to facilitate. ***How do we respond strategically, innovatively and collaboratively to serve this changing population? What skills are required?***

**Our capacity to serve individuals with increasingly complex needs:** More than ever before, agencies are supporting individuals with complex and ultra-complex needs. The latter may have a developmental disability along with co-occurring mental health issues, challenging behaviours, opioid and similar significant addictions, as well as histories of criminal activity. For the ultra-complex individuals, the focus is on maintaining health and safety for all involved, concurrently with work on recovery, while maintaining integration within the community in a meaningful way. In addition, trauma in the lives of people with developmental disabilities is leading to an exploding population of people with intellectual disabilities who also have multiple, mental health diagnoses including addictions and the need for harm reduction. This emerging population requires significantly more resources and highly qualified staff. ***What promising and innovate practices can assist in addressing increasingly complex needs?***

**Our services in the context of current funding structures:** Current funding structures lack flexibility and do not fully cover costs associated with providing quality supports. More individuals are falling through the gaps, either by not being able to secure additional services when needed (for example, when a crisis occurs or an individual becomes palliative) or when individuals



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do not meet the narrow parameters of the set criteria (for example, when they fall outside of the IQ cut-off, or when individuals have significant co-existing disabilities and mental illness). ***How can innovation, collaboration, and other strategies help meet the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities with the limitations of current funding structures?***

## Innovate, Collaborate, Elevate

Keynote speakers, presenters, workshops and group discussions will be catalysts for conversations about topics such as:

### Innovation

- Technology-use:
  - Opportunities to create efficiencies in the sector
  - Bridging the skills gap with technology
  - Social media use
  - Human resource management tools
  - Accreditation digitization
  - Utilizing on-line training opportunities
- Social enterprise and business models
- Housing and residential models
- Models of support and risk mitigation in inclusive settings
- Robust and innovative intake methods
- Human resource models:
  - addressing workforce challenges
  - developing future leaders
  - creating an engaged, resilient, and inspired workforce
- Using representative and quality data to plan for service needs
- Human services models

### Collaboration

- Partnerships with other CDS service providers and organizations with common goals
- Sharing promising practices to address issues such as: complex needs, mental health, safety and self-care, including legal changes around safety
- Collaborative opportunities with post-secondary institutions

### Other strategies to elevate the sector

- Training and development
- Developing leadership capacity
- Developing strategic thinking
- Re-thinking organizational structure and capacity
- Family Managed Services (What does it involve? Respecting and offering choice in service provision)