Alberta Council of Disability Services
January 2024

SECTOR SCANNER 2023

In March 2022, ACDS published The Perfect Storm, reporting on the rising administrative costs in the Community Disability Services (CDS) sector, and their magnified impact when coupled with escalating workforce challenges [1]. The report was an instrumental factor in data-driven advocacy, resulting, notably, in a mid-year infusion of administrative funding to the sector in late 2022 and ongoing allocation of the same in Budget 2023.

This inaugural issue of the Sector Scanner updates the data reported in The Perfect Storm. It also expands on it by including sector leaders' perspectives on what they sense are the most pervasive issues, or those that may be emerging yet showing tendencies to becoming pressing concerns for more than just the current period. In this respect, the Sector Scanner aims to be: (i) an advocacy tool, as a credible data source for key issues in the current state, and (ii) a bellwether, indicating potential future state issues that CDS service providers and funders alike may need to prepare for.

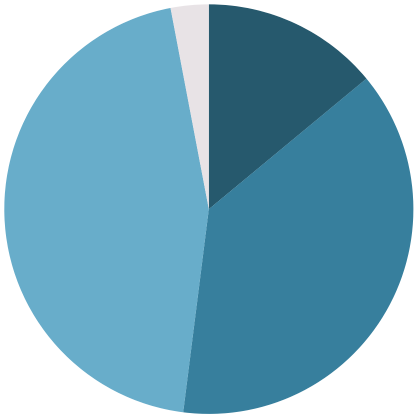
As was the case in 2022, financial concerns were top of mind for service providers. Despite funding infusions for staff wages and rising administrative costs, 52% of service providers felt that their PDD services were at moderate or high risk in the coming year.

The CDS workforce continues to be strained. Low wages, staff burnout and mental health, an aging workforce, and inadequate skill development opportunities were intensifying recruitment and retention pressures for organizations.

Inflation and shelter costs were the top emerging concerns in 2023. Inflation in Alberta increased 2.5% from November 2022 to 2023 [2]. Over the same time, shelter costs increased 8.5%. 51% of service providers felt their housing services were at high or moderate risk due to increasing costs. 57% had individuals in their services who were having difficulties making rental or mortgage payments.

Availability of accessible, affordable housing has deep implications for the safety and stability of individuals in service, and for the effective delivery of housing supports. ACDS is planning to engage stakeholders to develop collaborative solutions to address this crisis.

FINANCIAL CONCERNS



52%

of survey respondents felt that their PDD services were at **moderate or high risk** in the next year **due to increasing unfunded costs**

*Do you feel that your **PDD services are at risk** in the 2023/24 fiscal year due to **increasing unfunded costs**?*

HIGH RISK 14% | **MODERATE RISK 38%** | **SOME RISK 45%** | **NO RISK 3%**

Though the CDS sector received a funding infusion for community-based worker wages and administrative costs in 2023 [3,4], many service providers continue to struggle with rising costs. 14% of survey responders felt that their PDD services were at high risk due to increasing costs, and 97% of respondent felt that their services were, at minimum, at 'some risk'.

To mitigate these challenges, some organizations have prioritized seeking additional grants or donors to supplement funding and address increasing costs. At the same time, many organizations are apprehensive to rely on these less reliable or predictable sources.

"PDD currently represents approximately 90% of our business. We would like to reduce this number by 25% over the next 5 years."

"I will have to reduce other activities to fund the short fall in the interim if I lose a donor."

REVENUES

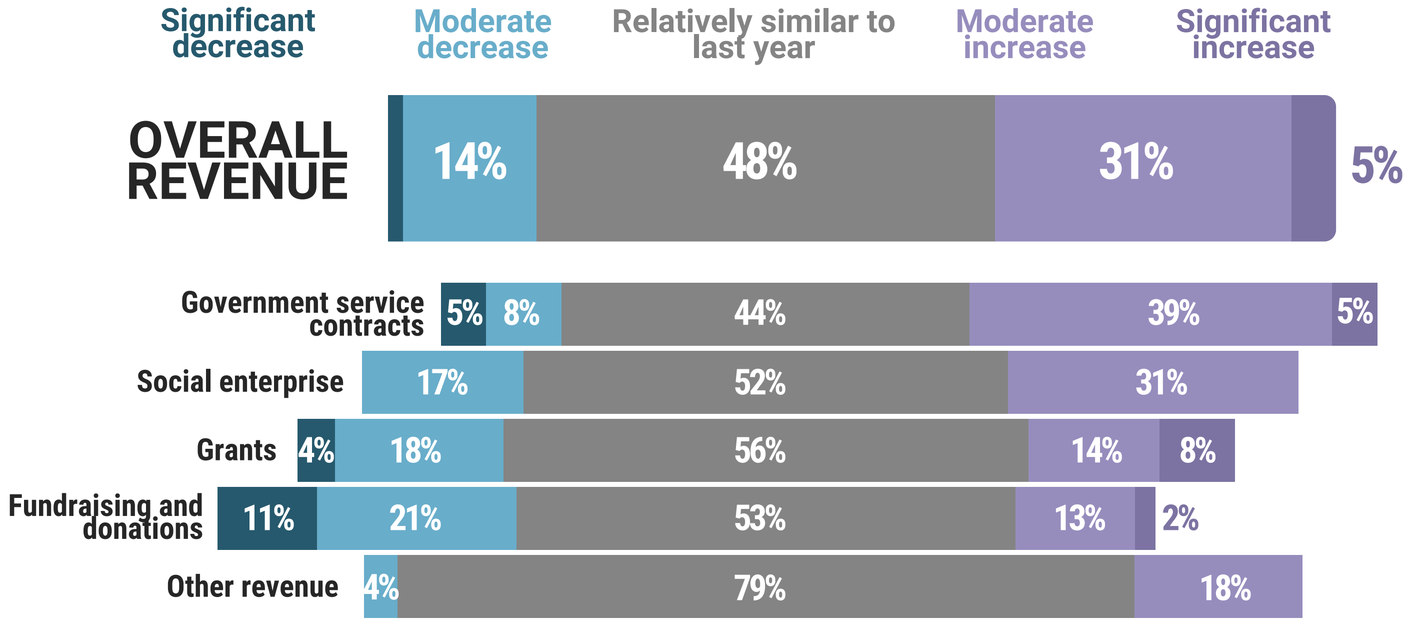
In December 2022, the Government of Alberta announced a $26 million funding increase for the CDS sector, effective January 2023. The infusion included a ten percent increase in funding for staffing, as well as $2 million to support indirect costs [3]. The 2023 Alberta budget continued this funding, with $89 million for disability service worker staffing costs and a 5% increase to administrative costs in PDD, FSCD, and FMS agreements [4]. This increase is reflected in the number of organizations reporting a 'moderate or significant increase' in their government service contracts (44% of respondents) or an increase in their overall revenue (36% of respondents).

Revenues decreased in other areas such as grants (22% of respondents had a moderate or significant decrease in grant revenue) as well as fundraising and donations (33% of respondents had seen a decrease). Despite the seeming precariousness of these sources, several respondents had decided to give increased attention to diversifying their revenues through these sources.

"We have had to add a role to our organization that solely looks at grants, fundraising, and new ventures that bring financial support to our program."

"We have proactively launched a fund development campaign and invested resources into grant funding submission development."

***Compared to last year**, what is the status that best describes your organization's **revenue**?*



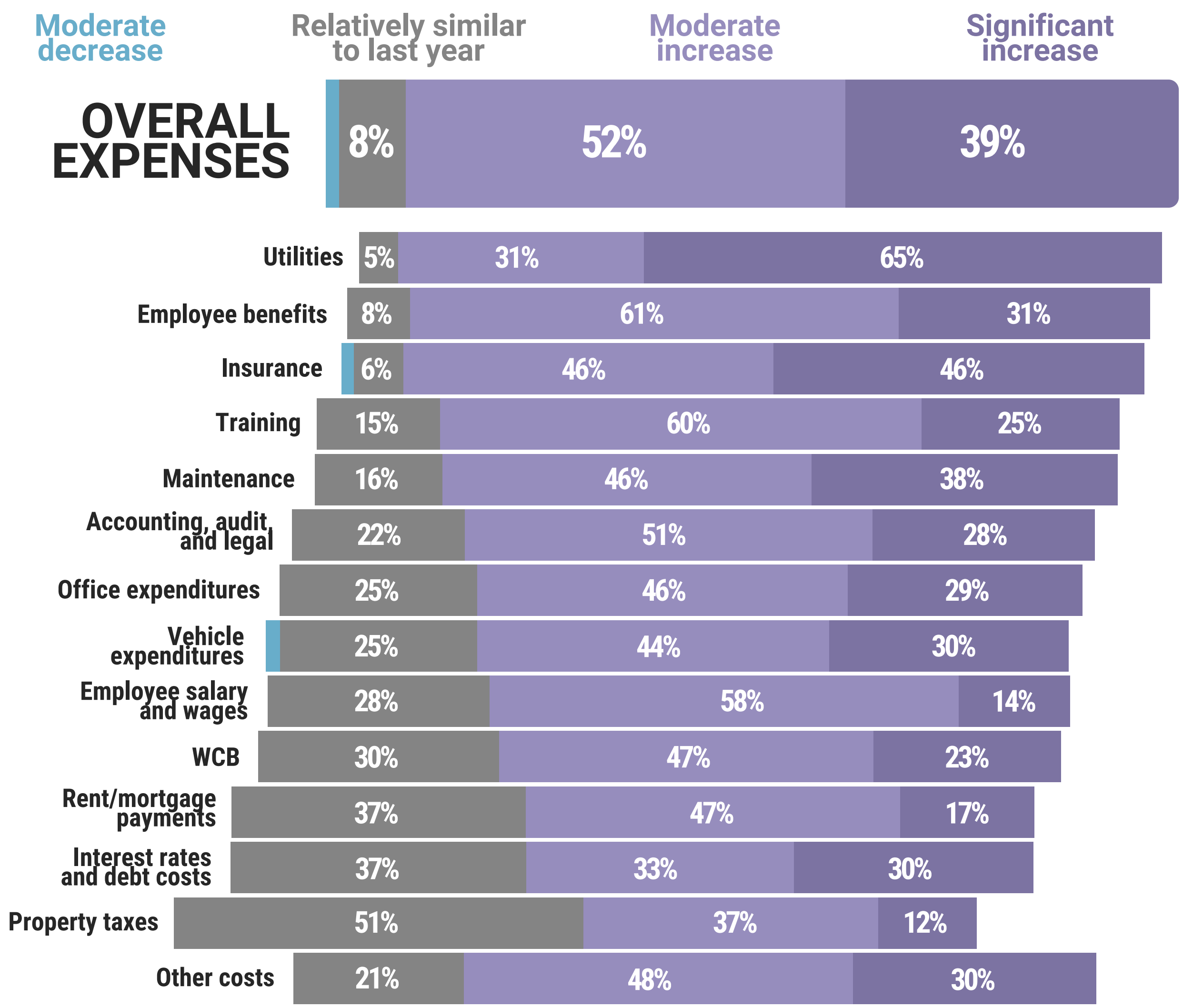
EXPENSES

91%

of service providers reported that their expenses had either experienced a **moderate** or **significant increase** over the past year

Organizations reported no significant decrease in any area of expenses over the past year. Over 75% of organizations stated that the cost of their utilities, employee benefits, insurance, training, maintenance, and accounting/legal fees had increased over the past year, and 65% saw a significant increase in utilities alone.

***Compared to last year**, what is the status that best describes your organization's **expenses**?*



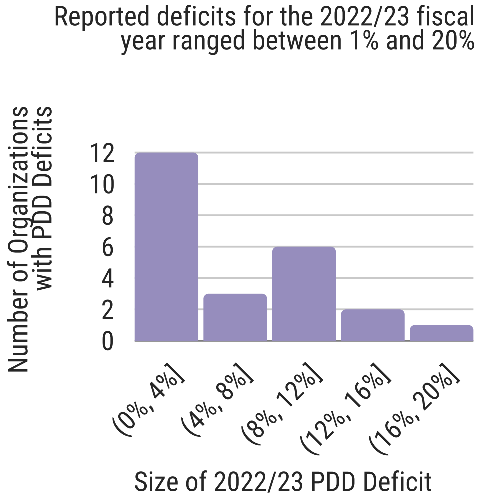
46% of respondents reported a deficit in their PDD budget last year, while 42% predict a deficit in the upcoming fiscal year.

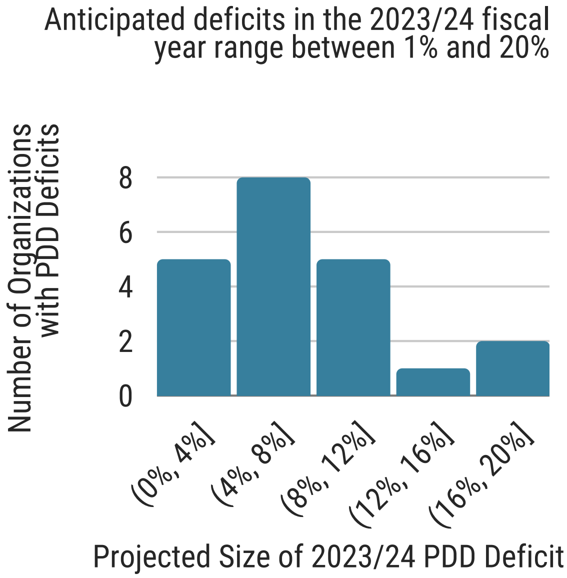
Of those organizations that shared their 2022/23 deficits, the average deficit was 5.9%, and ranged between 1% and 20%. Projected deficits for 2023/24 fell within a similar range, with an estimated average of 7.4% for projected deficits.

46%

of service providers had a **deficit in their 2022/23 PDD budget**

"While we are not operating a deficit, [...] this translates to minimum services being provided, not necessarily the services that are required/needed for the [individual accessing services] to be successful."





42%

of service providers are anticipating a **deficit in their 2023/24 PDD budget**

"We are continually looking for funding solutions that will offset administration costs and other expenses."

51%

of service providers are considering **reducing or changing** other aspects of their **non-PDD-funded services for individuals with disabilities** due to the financial pressures of underfunded PDD services

Changes to transportation was the most commonly-mentioned change that organizations were considering implementing due to financial concerns. Some services were increasing their transportation fees, while others were either limiting the transportation services they provided or eliminating transportation services altogether.

Some organizations were exploring increasing their program fees to address rising costs; however, this was not always a viable option given that individuals were already struggling with rising costs.

Other changes included cutting housing projects, increasing rental costs, selling housing stock, cutting positions, and doubling up individualized services.

In March 2022, 72% of survey respondents had moved PDD funding from Direct to Indirect Services due to rising costs; when surveyed in late 2023, this number had risen to 78%.

78%

of service providers have moved PDD funding from **Direct to Indirect due to rising costs** in the past year

"This will now be an ongoing requirement in order to keep operations running."

"PDD simply does not provide enough Indirect to support agencies' increasing costs. Plus they have moved items from Direct to Indirect on the budget without allowing for more indirect funding to offset the changes."

A STRAINED WORKFORCE

Recruiting and retaining a trained, qualified, and dedicated workforce has been a chronic issue in the CDS sector. This issue is compounded by low wages, burnout, an aging workforce, and limited post-secondary options.

WAGES

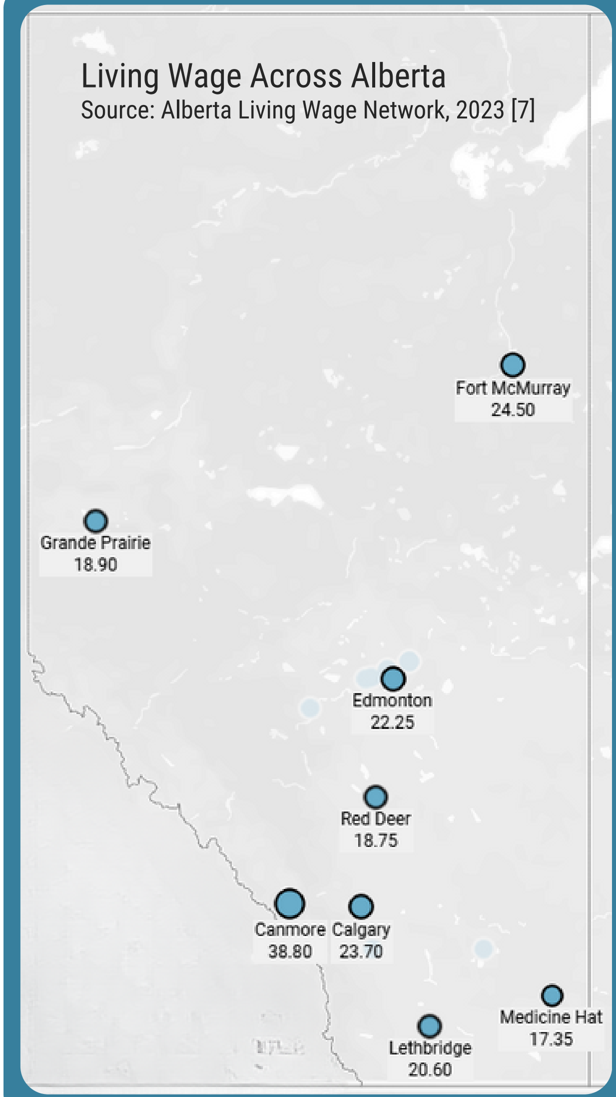
In 2020, 54% of the entire CDS workforce made under $20 per hour [5].

In late 2022, for the first time since 2014, the government announced a 10% increase in funding for staffing in the CDS sector [3,4].

Organizations had flexibility in how they allocated the new funding. Some employees received a flat raise, while others were able to set up or increase their health benefits. Organizations also needed to address increased MERC costs due to the increased compensation. Thus, not all frontline workers saw a full 10% increase directly in their paycheck.

92% of respondents indicated that the rising cost of living/inflation were among the top issues they were seeing affect their workforce.

While nearly half of all Canadians are living paycheck to paycheck [6] and living wages continue to rise across Alberta [7], growing costs are challenging the health of the CDS workforce. When workers cannot afford the price of living, they tend to seek better-paying work elsewhere, such as government jobs with higher rates and benefits, or employment in a different sector completely.



"PDD gave a 10% increase to direct wages so this helped us get health benefits for staff, but [staff] are still wanting wage increases and they do not understand there are other wage costs such as EI, CPP, and WCB that also increase with higher wages."

"10% was put directly to wages but our staff are still 1-2 dollars under what other agencies are paid. [...] The current wages are not attracting new hires."

BURNOUT AND MENTAL HEALTH

Organizations continued to report issues related to burnout and poor mental health among their staff.

Mental health concerns are an increasing issue among Canadians in general, with only 59% reporting very good or excellent mental in 2021, compared to 72% in 2015 [8].

Workers in health care and social assistance fields have a higher percentage of work-related stress than the general population [9].

In the CDS sector, stresses related to challenging work and lower rates of pay are exacerbated by constant high turnover. Organizations increase their reliance on existing staff, making it difficult for them to take time off for self-care. The result is an increasingly strained workforce.

72%

of service providers reported that **mental health** was one of the top three issues affecting their workforce

63%

of service providers listed **employee burnout** as one of the top three issues affecting their workforce

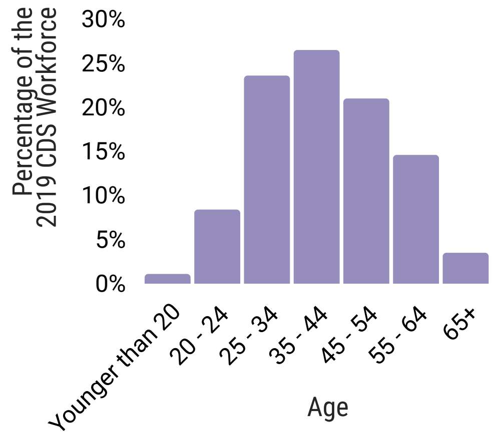
*"The workforce in the past five years has shifted.
More and more people are making poor decisions while on shift. [...]
I think the Covid years really impacted the workforce as a whole."*

27%

of Canadian **health care and social assistance** employees say that they experience **high or very high levels of work-related stress**, compared to an overall average of 21% [9]

AGING WORKFORCE

When age demographics were last collected for the CDS workforce in 2019, 9.5% of the workforce were under the age of 25, while 18.1% were over the age of 55 [10].



In **1984**, for every

100 Canadians aged 15 to 24 (entering the labour market),

50 Canadians were aged 55 to 64 (leaving the labour market)

In **2022**, for every

100 Canadians aged 15 to 24 (entering the labour market),

114 Canadians were aged 55 to 64 (leaving the labour market) [11,12]

Over the past 40 years, the shape of the Canadian labour market has skewed to an older workforce. As baby boomers and Generation X transition from the labour force to retirement, the labour gap they leave behind becomes more difficult to fill. [11,12]

For the CDS sector, an aging workforce, approaching retirement, amplifies the recruitment issue for service providers already grappling with recruiting frontline workers due to high turnover. Furthermore, since older workers are more likely to be in management or executive roles, organizations have the added challenge of recruiting for positions requiring high-level managerial skills.

"Our aging workforce is looking toward retirement with no new people to replace them."

MISMATCHED SKILLS

Most post-secondary programs in disability studies have closed across Alberta due to low enrollment, resulting in many new entrants to the disability sector arriving with little or no formal training or education in disability services. ACDS' Project Blueprint reported that since many job applicants do not understand the range and complexity of skills needed to work in the CDS sector, recruiters are often inundated by job seekers with erroneous expectations or irrelevant experience. Organizations are forced to choose between hiring staff who do not have the right set of competencies needed (and incurring skill development training costs) or not hiring at all [13].

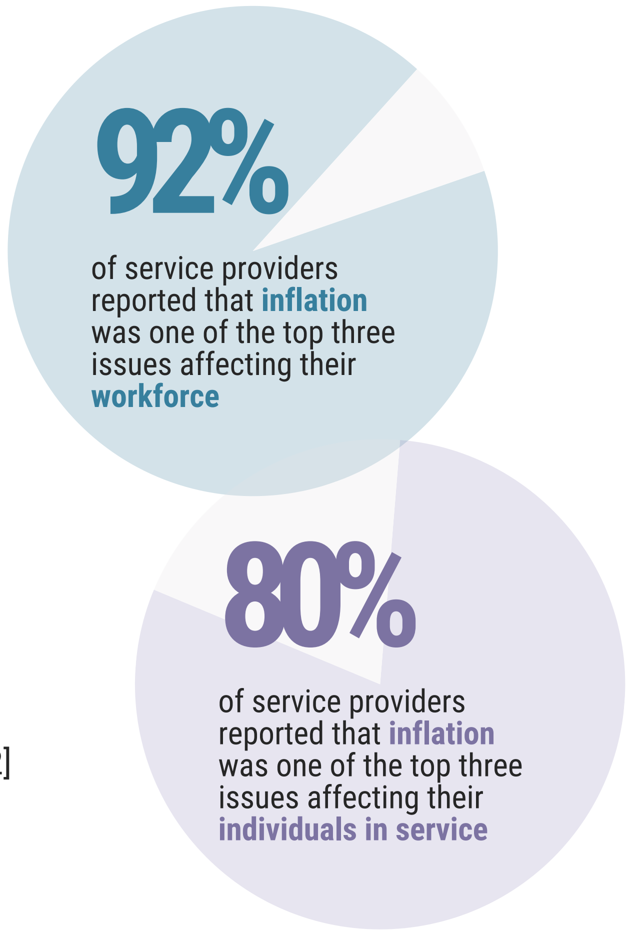
EMERGING ISSUES

When asked to identify the most significant issues experienced over the past year, respondents reported recruitment, retention, and wages as the most common, ongoing concerns. Inflation and the cost of housing, however, were the top emerging issues for 2023.

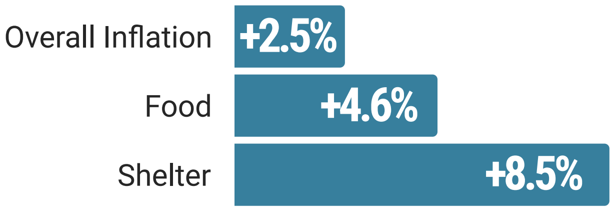
INFLATION

Inflation continues to affect all aspects of service provision in the CDS sector. After common workforce challenges such as recruitment and retention, inflation was the most-mentioned concern for organizations in 2023. Service providers were finding it difficult to absorb the rising costs of essential expenses such as utilities, property taxes, employee benefits, transportation, and office supplies.

In addition, the 10% increase in funding for staffing costs did not extend to supervisory positions; this meant that some organizations were compelled to redirect the administrative funding infusion, meant to address inflation, to salaries for supervisors, managers, and administrative staff instead to address wage compression and retention difficulties.

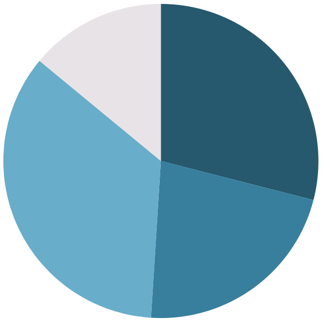


NOVEMBER 2022 TO NOVEMBER 2023, ALBERTA [2]



"Inflation is affecting our organization, its staff, and the individuals as a whole. The higher cost of living is making our daily lives difficult and [it is] hard to make ends meet."

HOUSING



51%

of survey respondents felt that their **ability to provide housing services** was at **high** or **moderate risk** in the 2023/24 fiscal year

*Do you feel that your **ability to provide housing services are at risk** in the 2023/24 fiscal year due to increasing costs (utilities, insurance, mortgage rates, etc.)?*

HIGH RISK	MODERATE RISK	SOME RISK	NO RISK
29%	22%	35%	14%

HOUSING PRICES

5.6% The **average price to buy a house, condo, or apartment** in Alberta has increased by 5.6% over the past year

Over the past year, the price for a **detached home** has gone up by **8.1%**

Both **semi-detached and row houses** have increased by **6.4%** [14]

"We have no capital resources to secure housing for sustainability. We lease all of our residences and have to pass the cost on to clients or absorb it."

RENTAL PRICES

Over the past year, the **average rent** in Alberta for an **apartment or condo** rose to $1,695, an increase of **16%**

Over the past year, the **average rate for roommate listings** in Alberta has jumped from $738 to $877, an increase of **19%** [15]

INTEREST RATE SHOCK

Though housing prices have risen, there is an additional concern on the horizon for the many residences that will need to renew their mortgages at much higher interest rates than they are currently paying. Over the next two years, approximately 45% of Canadian mortgages will be facing interest rate shock as they come up for renewal [16]; while this will pose a difficulty for individual homeowners, these growing financial pressures are multiplied for organizations renewing multiple mortgages.

AFFORDABILITY

57% of organizations surveyed are providing services to individuals who are **having difficulty or are unable to make their rental or mortgage payments**

Rental increases are often difficult to absorb, particularly for people with developmental disabilities in Alberta who quite often pay for housing with their AISH payments (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped), which in January 2024 is a maximum of $1,863 per month [17]. From 2024 on, AISH will be annually indexed for inflation [18], though the Consumer Price Index shows that over the past year, general shelter costs (accounting for both mortgages and rental prices) have increased at a faster rate than inflation [19].

In 2017,

30% of individuals with cognitive disabilities (learning, memory, and developmental disabilities) spent 30% or more of their income on shelter costs, as compared to...

20% of the general Canadian population [20]

In 2023,

62% of surveyed Canadians spent over 30% of their income on shelter costs [21]

SAFE HOUSING

40% of respondents provide services to individuals who are living in **unstable neighbourhoods** with **high rates of crime, poor city services, or excessive noise**

38% of organizations are supporting individuals who are living in **housing of inferior quality with inadequate plumbing or heat, leaks, holes, etc.**

STABLE HOUSING

40% of organizations reported individuals in service who are struggling with **multiple or forced moves**

33% of organizations are providing services to individuals who are dealing with **foreclosure or eviction**

INDIVIDUALS STRUGGLING WITH HOMELESSNESS

35% of organizations are providing services to individuals who are struggling with **hidden homelessness**, and are **unhoused and living with family or friends due to having no alternatives**

22% of organizations reported individuals in service who are **unhoused and living in a homeless shelter or on the street**

"We currently have people on waitlist for [overnight staffed residence] supports because there simply is no available housing which is suitable. We also have people in [overnight staffed residence] supports whose needs are changing and need a different housing model, but there is simply nothing available that they can afford."

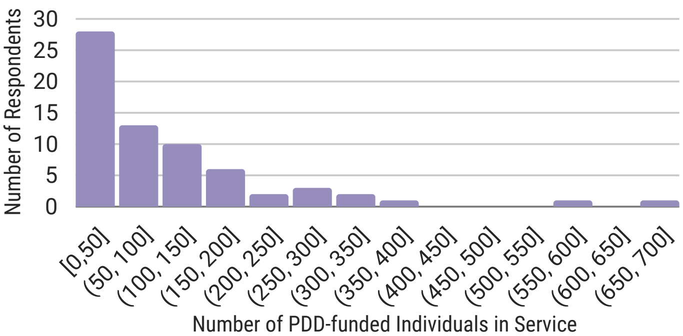
APPENDIX: SURVEY RESPONSES

Sent to ACDS members in late October to early November 2023, the survey had a response rate of 52% (68 of 132 ACDS full organizational members). Select survey results are broken down by PDD supports provided or number of PDD-funded individuals in service.

What types of PDD-funded supports/programs does your organization provide? (n=68)

Support Type	Percentage of Respondents
Overnight Staffed Residences	74%
Support Homes / Supportive Roommate Living Arrangements	62%
Supported Independent Living	69%
In-home Respite	49%
Out-of-home Respite	59%
Employment Supports	57%
Community Access and Recreation	88%
Other Direct Supports	12%

Approximately how many PDD-funded individuals does your organization support? (n=67)



Did you have a deficit in your PDD budget for the 2022/23 fiscal year?

Yes	No	Number of Respondents
46%	54%	67

Are you budgeting/anticipating a deficit in your PDD budget for the 2023/24 fiscal year?

Category	Yes	No	Number of Respondents
Overall Average	**42%**	**58%**	**66**
Responses by Organizational Size (Number of PDD Individuals in Service)			
<50 PDD Individuals in Service	57%	43%	23
50 - 149 PDD Individuals in Service	32%	68%	22
150+ PDD Individuals in Service	40%	60%	20
Responses by Services Offered			
Residential and Respite Provider	40%	60%	58
Employment Supports Provider	36%	64%	39
Community Access and Recreation Provider	44%	56%	57

Do you feel that your PDD services are at risk in the 2023/24 fiscal year due to increasing unfunded costs?

Category	No Risk to PDD Services	Some Risk to PDD Services	Moderate Risk to PDD Services	High Risk to PDD Services	Number of Respondents
Overall Average	**3%**	**45%**	**38%**	**14%**	**65**
Responses by Organizational Size (Number of PDD Individuals in Service)					
<50 PDD Individuals in Service	0%	35%	39%	26%	23
50 - 149 PDD Individuals in Service	0%	45%	55%	0%	22
150+ PDD Individuals in Service	10%	55%	20%	15%	20
Responses by Services Offered					
Residential and Respite Provider	2%	45%	40%	14%	58
Employment Supports Provider	5%	37%	45%	13%	38
Community Access and Recreation Provider	3%	43%	40%	14%	58

Are you considering reducing or changing other aspects of your non-PDD-funded services for individuals with disabilities due to the financial pressures of underfunded PDD services?

Yes	No	Number of Respondents
51%	49%	65

Have you moved PDD funding from Direct to Indirect due to rising costs in the past year?

Yes	No	Number of Respondents
78%	22%	63

Do you feel that your ability to provide housing services are at risk in the 2023/24 fiscal year due to increasing costs (utilities, insurance, mortgage rates, etc.)?

Number of PDD Individuals in Service	No Risk to Housing Services	Some Risk to Housing Services	Moderate Risk to Housing Services	High Risk to Housing Services	Number of Respondents
Overall Average	**14%**	**35%**	**22%**	**29%**	**49**
Responses by Organizational Size (Number of PDD Individuals in Service)					
<50 PDD Individuals in Service	31%	25%	25%	19%	16
50 - 149 PDD Individuals in Service	13%	38%	19%	31%	16
150+ PDD Individuals in Service	0%	41%	24%	35%	17

Compared to last year, what is the status that best describes your organization's:

Revenue Category	Significant decrease	Moderate decrease	Relatively similar to last year	Moderate increase	Significant increase	Number of Respondents
Overall Revenue	**1.6%**	**14.1%**	**48.4%**	**31.3%**	**4.7%**	**64**
Government Service Contract Revenue	5%	8%	44%	39%	5%	62
Social Enterprise Revenue	0%	17%	52%	31%	0%	29
Fundraising / Donation Revenue	11%	21%	53%	13%	2%	47
Grant Revenue	4%	18%	56%	14%	8%	50
Other Revenue	0%	4%	79%	18%	0%	28

Compared to last year, what is the status that best describes your organization's:

Expense Category	Significant decrease	Moderate decrease	Relatively similar to last year	Moderate increase	Significant increase	Number of Respondents
Overall Expenses	**0.0%**	**1.6%**	**7.8%**	**51.6%**	**39.1%**	**64**
Utility Costs	0%	0%	5%	31%	65%	62
Employee Benefits Costs	0%	0%	8%	61%	31%	64
Insurance Costs	0%	2%	6%	46%	46%	65
Training Costs	0%	0%	15%	60%	25%	65
Maintenance Costs	0%	0%	16%	46%	38%	63
Accounting / Audit / Legal Fees	0%	0%	22%	51%	28%	65
Office Expenditures	0%	0%	25%	46%	29%	65
Vehicle Expenditures	0%	2%	25%	44%	30%	57
Employee Salaries and Wages	0%	0%	28%	58%	14%	65
WCB Costs	0%	0%	30%	47%	23%	60
Rent / Mortgage Payments	0%	0%	37%	47%	17%	60
Interest Rates and Debt Costs	0%	0%	37%	33%	30%	57
Property Taxes	0%	0%	51%	37%	12%	49
Other Costs	0%	0%	21%	48%	30%	33

Please select the TOP 3 issues you have seen affecting your ***workforce*** *over the past year. (n=64)*

Issue	Percentage of Respondents
Rising Cost of Living / Inflation	92%
Mental Health	72%
Employee Burnout	63%
Housing Affordability and Accessibility	34%
Poverty and Social Inequality	16%
Health	11%
Other Workforce Issues	9%
Finding or Affording Childcare	6%
Crime and Safety	3%

Please select the TOP 3 issues you have seen affecting ***individuals accessing service and their families/guardians*** *over the past year. (n=64)*

Issue	Percentage of Respondents
Rising Cost of Living / Inflation	80%
Housing Affordability and Accessibility	61%
Mental Health	55%
Poverty and Social Inequality	36%
Health	30%
Employee Burnout	17%
Other Issues	14%
Crime and Safety	8%
Finding or Affording Childcare	2%

Have any of the individuals accessing service with your organization experienced any of the following forms of housing insecurity or homelessness over the past year? (n=63)

Housing Insecurity or Homelessness	Percentage of Respondents
Difficulty / Inability to Make Rental or Mortgage Payments	57%
Foreclosure or Eviction	33%
Multiple Moves or Forced Moves	40%
Overcrowding	10%
Inferior Housing Quality (inadequate plumbing or heat, leaks, holes, etc.)	38%
Neighbourhood Instability (high rates of crime, poor city services, noise, etc.)	40%
Hidden homelessness (unhoused and living with family or friends due to having nowhere else to live)	35%
Homelessness (unhoused and living in a homeless shelter, on the street, etc.)	22%
Finding or affording childcare	2%

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