

#BlueprintCDS

Blueprint CDS: A Comprehensive Workforce Strategy for Community Disability Services

December 19, 2022



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Background

The Alberta Council of Disability Services (ACDS) is a non-profit association of Community Disability Services (CDS) sector organizations in Alberta. ACDS works closely with the Government of Alberta (Government) and other partners to strengthen the CDS sector to benefit Albertans with developmental disabilities, through information gathering, advocacy, accreditation and other avenues.

ACDS has invested in a process to identify and describe the challenges faced by the CDS sector regarding the recruitment and retention of their workforce. Specifically, ACDS' research suggests that the majority of the sector's workforce challenges are due to low wages, increasing demands brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and increasing complexity of needs for individuals being cared for. These challenges are exacerbated by COVID-19 pandemic-related worker burnout and fatigue, manifesting through higher vacancy and turnover rates.

In spring 2022, ACDS received funding from the Government to lead the development of a sector-driven workforce strategy, called **Project Blueprint CDS**. With support from KPMG, this work has included research, labour market analysis, survey data and sector engagement to identify key workforce challenges, and co-created (with the CDS sector) a set of recommended strategies.

This document is intended to highlight the importance of the recommended strategies as a tool to recruit and retain a sustainable workforce that will safely deliver services that meet the needs of Albertans with disabilities. These recommended strategies have been refined as part of the ongoing work of Project Blueprint CDS and will ultimately be finalized with an accompanying Implementation Plan that is expected to be released in spring 2023.

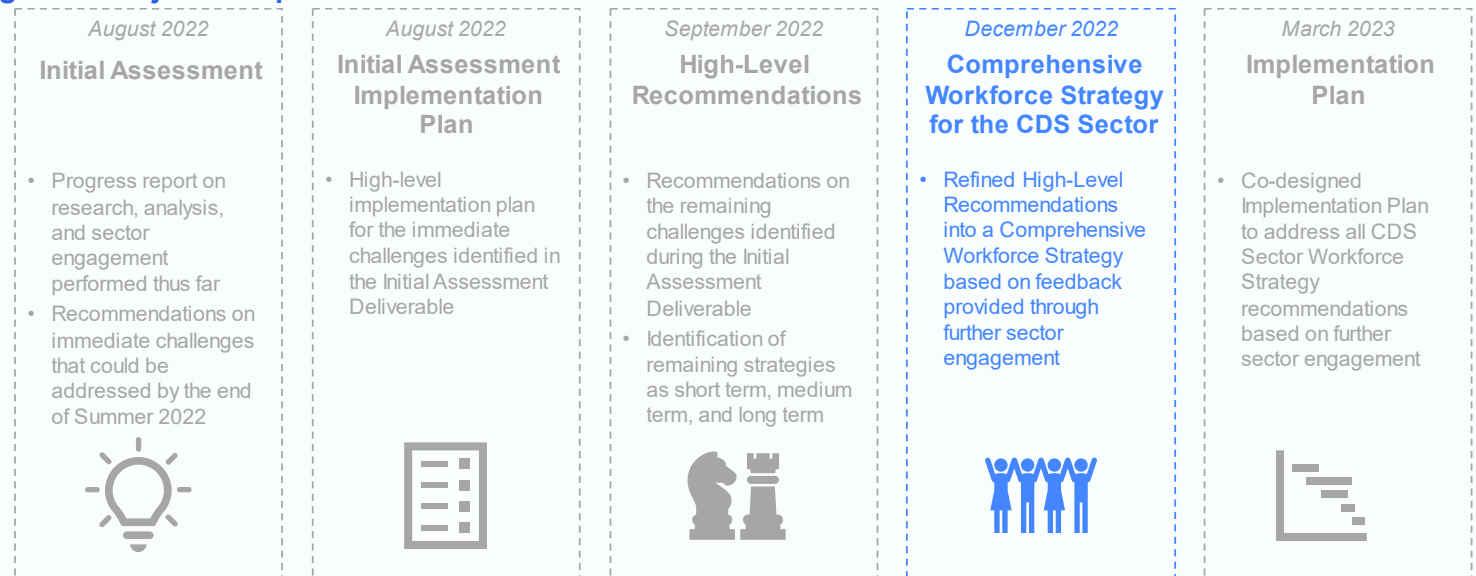
Background

The Comprehensive Workforce Strategy is intended to be used as a tool to recruit and retain a sustainable workforce that will safely deliver quality services that meet the needs of Albertans with disabilities. The strategy is the culmination of several phases of work, including the following:

- Completion of an Initial Assessment and High-Level Recommendations that highlighted the key workforce challenges faced by the sector and outlined a suite of preliminary recommendations designed to address those key workforce challenges.

- Engagement with the CDS Sector to validate, review and add to the preliminary recommendations. This engagement was conducted in Fall 2022 via a series of workshops across Alberta. These workshops were attended by roughly 133 attendees representing 78 CDS organizations as well as other sector stakeholders.

Figure 1: Project Blueprint CDS Overview



Background

Methodology

A mixed methods approach was used to develop an understanding of the current CDS sector workforce and its future needs. The approach included:

- **Sector engagement** through:
 - *Blueprint CDS Survey*
 - *Focus sessions*
 - *Roadshow workshops*
- **Desktop research** with specific focus on:
 - *Jurisdictional research*
 - *ACDS reports*
 - *Labour market data*

As a starting point, based on sector engagement, research and analysis conducted to date, three overarching themes became evident of the kinds of workforce challenges that are currently facing the CDS sector. These are outlined on the following page.

- A. Understanding workforce context,
- B. Recruiting and retaining the workforce, and
- C. Developing the workforce.

Current State Workforce Challenges

A. Understanding workforce context

The context, purpose, value and functions of the CDS sector workforce.

Lack of visibility and buy-in. There is a lack of visibility into and buy-in to the value and complexity of the work of the CDS sector.



Parallel and duplicate systems. The CDS sector is creating duplicate processes to support individuals to access the supports they need outside of what is delivered by CDS organizations.



Increasingly complex service needs. The scope and needs of individuals referred to CDS sector supports and their families are growing and becoming more complex.



Rural factors. Rural communities experience workforce challenges more severely.



B. Recruiting and retaining the workforce

The things that affect whether workers choose to enter and stay in the CDS sector.

Low wages. Wages are low relative to similar sectors and have been outpaced by the increasing cost of living in Alberta.



Competition from other sectors. There is competition for resources from organizations and support sectors that provide better pay, work environment, multidisciplinary teams, etc.



Work environment. The workforce brings expectations about work environment, supports, working in multidisciplinary teams, etc. that the CDS sector is not currently able to meet.



Leadership gap. Senior leaders in the CDS sector are retiring and there is a lack of experienced, willing staff to take their place.



C. Developing the workforce

The things that affect the CDS sector's ability to deliver quality services.

Barriers to training. There is a lack of funding available for training. Specialized training opportunities can be limited or expensive. Services providers find themselves having to provide their own time consuming, expensive training which is further compounded due to high staff turnover.



Rigid contracts. The current contract parameters with Government are rigid and do not allow for service providers to be flexible about how they deliver services and support their workforce.



Mismatched staff skill sets. It is difficult to find and hire individuals with the skill sets needed by service providers. Competency criteria are not consistent and most new workers do not enter the field with a formal disability services qualification.



Lack of post-secondary training. There is a lack of post-secondary training available as many programs across the province have closed due to lack of demand.



Recommended Strategies

Overview

The workforce challenges depicted have led to a CDS sector that is in crisis. High vacancy rates and staff turnover prevent the sector from being able to maintain required staffing ratios and minimum training requirements. If these workforce challenges are not addressed, the sector could see an increased risk to the safety and well-being of individuals receiving services, and an increased risk to frontline staff safety. Government and CDS service providers share in the responsibility for these risks and their consequences.

The CDS sector-led workforce strategy has identified a set of recommendations that aim to create an adequate, sustainable and educated workforce. The recommended strategies will help drive transformational change for the sector by focusing on **recruitment and retention of a more skilled and professional workforce that delivers a higher-quality service to Albertans.**

The recommended strategies align with the following three themes. Additional detail related to each of the recommendations is found on the following pages.

- **Understanding Workforce Context:** The strategies that are designed to increase understanding of the impact and competencies of the workforce;
- **Recruiting and Retaining the Workforce:** The strategies that are designed to increase the level of recruitment and retention of the workforce; and
- **Developing the Workforce:** The strategies that are designed to increase the level of skills and capabilities of the workforce.

Recommended Strategies

Overview

It is crucial to the success of Project Blueprint CDS that the CDS Workforce Strategy be sector-led. Engagement with the CDS Sector to validate, review and add to the recommendations was completed in Fall 2022 via a series of workshops across Alberta. These workshops were attended by roughly 133 attendees representing 78 CDS organizations, as well as other sector stakeholders.

By engaging with the CDS sector, Project Blueprint CDS gained valuable insights into the sector's needs and concerns while simultaneously building support for the recommendations. While detailed revisions were made to the recommendations based on input from the workshop participants (laid out on the following pages), common themes also emerged across the feedback provided:



Overall, the recommendations were supported



Some of the recommendations are dependent on an initial stabilization of the sector, such as through the increase in wages.



There was overarching support for efforts to professionalize the sector, including increasing expectations, wages and training.



There may be an opportunity to leverage existing efforts being made by other in and close to the sector around the province.



There was support for efforts to better understand and document the current state of the sector, as well as to determine if the current state is appropriate for the sector.



There needs to be a balance between consistency across the Province and respect for service provider autonomy to tailor to the unique needs of their organization and the individuals they serve.



Implementation of the recommendations needs to respect service provider time and capacity.

Recommended Strategies

A. Understanding Workforce Context

Recommendation	Description
A1: Build a shared understanding of the economic impact of the CDS sector	<p><i>Complete an economic impact analysis to better understand and communicate the economic impact of the CDS sector in Alberta in order to support a case for further investment in the sector.</i></p> <p>The scope of this recommendation includes the completion of an economic impact analysis that would have the following objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Identify and explore the economic impact of the CDS sector, including the impacts of employment of the CDS sector workforce and labour market participation of the families of individuals in service. – Assess the downstream impact of what the costs would be to other sectors (e.g., Justice, Health) if the CDS sector did not exist. – Communicate the findings to the CDS sector, Government and the public.
A2: Build a shared understanding of the scope of practice of CDS sector services	<p><i>Create an inventory of the services provided across the sector and the competencies needed to adequately provide those services.</i></p> <p>The scope of this recommendation includes working with CDS sector organizations to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Take inventory of the services currently being offered by the sector across Alberta. – Build common definitions for those services. – Define what specific competencies are needed to provide those services. – Compile and share this inventory with the sector as a whole, as well as with Government.
A3: Adopt common workforce classifications	<p><i>Revisit ACDS' Workforce Classification System (WCS) to address any new competencies identified through recommendation A2 to support the growing complexity of needs among individuals in service.</i></p> <p>The scope of this recommendation includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Meeting with sector stakeholders to review the outputs of recommendation A2 and identify the competencies that should be included in the WCS (e.g., editing out outliers, identifying areas of practice that are being provided by the sector that are not within the sector's scope). – Updating the WCS to include the competencies identified by stakeholders. <p>ACDS should continue to advocate for consistent use of common workforce classifications using the WCS across the CDS sector.</p>

Recommended Strategies

A. Understanding Workforce Context

Recommendation	Description
<p>A4: Adopt a network model to support cross-ministry coordination</p>	<p><i>Design a CDS sector-specific network model adapted from the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) network model.</i></p> <p>The network includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Cross-Government of Alberta Ministry leadership – Case planning and coordination – Sharing of resources and expertise to support individuals – An integrated cross-system case management system <p>The scope of this recommendation includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Review FASD network models and findings of FASD network reviews and evaluations. – Connect with FASD network members to understand the evolution, implementation characteristics and potential improvement areas for the model. – Create an initial model design adapted from the FASD network model and tailored to the CDS sector. – Meet with the CDS sector to review and validate the model. – Engage directly with the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services (SCSS), the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General to propose the network model and encourage their commitment. <p>The implementation of the model and an integrated cross-system case management system is not in scope of this recommendation.</p>
<p>A5: Develop a forecasting model to support strategic workforce planning</p>	<p><i>Develop a forecasting model that gives service providers the information they need to anticipate and strategically plan for their future workforce needs. This includes inputs such as current staffing levels, service provision waitlist information and historic FASD caseloads to highlight the supply and demand considerations of the sector's workforce.</i></p> <p>The scope of this recommendation includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Collaboration with the CDS sector to establish forecasting model parameters such as granularity of outputs (e.g., outputs provided at municipality, region, or service provider level), and to set the scope in regards to types of services incorporated into the model (e.g., mental health, addiction). – Collaboration with the CDS sector to understand their current staffing numbers and services providers, and SCSS to understand historic FASD caseloads, current Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) caseloads and waitlists. – Development of the forecasting model that delivers an output that meets the established parameters. – Sharing the forecasted outputs with the CDS sector and Government partners.

Recommended Strategies

B. Recruiting and Retaining the Workforce

Recommendation	Description
<p>B6: Provide immediate and ongoing wage relief</p>	<p><i>Collaborate with Government on providing immediate and ongoing wage relief for the entire CDS sector workforce (e.g., frontline, back office, administration).</i></p> <p>The scope of this recommendation includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Providing one-time wage relief funding to current CDS staff to address and stabilize the current workforce retention issues. The amount of wage relief funding could be tied to inflation. – Funding wage parity within the CDS sector on an ongoing basis. This includes funding parity across Government and the CDS sector (non-government roles, and the indexation of wages to inflation moving forward to promote continued wage parity. – Providing a one-time reattachment bonus to incent former CDS staff to rejoin the sector after leaving through the COVID-19 pandemic. <p>Upon receipt of the Project Blueprint CDS Initial Assessment in summer 2022, the Government of Alberta identified that additional information was required to support the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Service’s (formerly Community and Social Services) submission to Treasury Board for the 2023/24 budget process. In response, ACDS provided an evidence-based briefing document that, among other things, estimated the funding required for each of the preliminary recommendations outlined in the Initial Assessment. As of the development of this document, there has been no announcement regarding funding for immediate and ongoing wage relief for the CDS sector.</p>
<p>B7: Build a wage scale guide for frontline service delivery staff</p>	<p><i>Develop a wage scale guide for frontline service delivery staff to provide a more equitable and consistent view and baseline of wage options for CDS workers across Alberta.</i></p> <p><i>The wage scale guide could consider factors such as staff credentials, competencies, regional differences in service delivery and cost of living, years of experience and level of service provision. Additionally, the wage scale guide could include elements that address broader compensation outside of wages, such as RRSP matching, and health and wellness benefits. While any wage scale would need to be voluntary, a guide could support service providers in advocating for additional funding and workers in advocating for higher wages.</i></p> <p>The scope of this recommendation includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Development of a draft wage scale guide that is based on leading practice and research into relevant, comparable industries. – Engagement with CDS sector service providers to review and validate the wage scale guide. – Finalization and distribution / promotion of the wage scale guide.

Recommended Strategies

B. Recruiting and Retaining the Workforce

Recommendation	Description
B8: Engage CDS sector workers to co-design a community of practice	<p><i>Support CDS sector workers to explore options for adapting a community of practice model to support them to share and learn from each other.</i></p> <p><i>While recommendation A4 is at a strategic, cross-ministry, leadership level, recommendation B8 is focused on building coordination and support at the service delivery level.</i></p> <p>The scope of this recommendation includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Using a co-design approach to identify how (and if) a community of practice could best serve front line workers and their supervisors and managers.– Bringing together a group of CDS sector workers representative of varying backgrounds, including location, ethnicity, education level, years of experience in the sector, etc. to serve as the design group.– Supporting the group in coming together for regular meetings to work through options and ultimately design a community of practice model to be piloted in the CDS sector.

Recommended Strategies

C. Developing the Workforce

Recommendation	Description
C9_A: Establish a target credential requirement for frontline CDS sector workers	<p><i>Develop a target credential requirement and implementation plan for all incoming frontline staff to standardize a basic training level.</i></p> <p>The scope of this recommendation includes engagement with the CDS sector to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Understand the credentials currently held by CDS sector workers,– Establish a baseline credential requirement for all new frontline workers entering the CDS sector, and– Establish a plan to implement the target credential and equivalences across the CDS sector, including grandfathering in existing CDS staff.
C9_B: Establish a system for micro-credentialing	<p><i>Leverage the existing work being performed by SCSS and collaborate with the Ministry of Advanced Education to offer a series of disability support programming courses.</i></p> <p><i>The courses will need to line up with the updated list of prescribed competencies within the CDS sector identified as part of recommendations A2 and A3. These courses could be “stacked” towards receipt of a diploma or CDS sector credentials. Work is currently being completed by Government around micro-credentialing. The exact scope of work related to this recommendation could be defined based on the results of the micro-credentialing work that is currently underway by Government. It is assumed that this existing work is sufficient to meet the needs of the CDS sector.</i></p> <p>The scope of this recommendation includes engagement with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– SCSS and Advanced Education to determine the exact scope of work currently being completed around micro-credentialing in Alberta,– CDS sector service providers to determine the specific scope of post-secondary institutions and credentials to be included as part of this recommendation, and– Identified post-secondary institutions to determine timing, administration and courses to be included as part of the micro-credentialing.

Recommended Strategies

C. Developing the Workforce

Recommendation	Description
C9_C: Expand post-secondary programming	<p><i>Partner with Advanced Education and SCSS to fund the expansion of disability support programming available in Alberta and provide tuition support through scholarships.</i></p> <p>The scope of this recommendation includes working with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– SCSS to providing funding to post-secondary institutions via Advanced Education’s Directed Provincial Grant Funding program for full-time, part-time and virtual disability support programming.– The CDS sector to ensure the disability support programming meets the sector’s needs.– Advanced Education to establish a tuition support program (e.g., scholarship, bursaries) for individuals that enroll in disability support programming.
C9_D: Identify current state of training	<p><i>Develop a comprehensive province-wide map of existing training opportunities and conduct a gap analysis.</i></p> <p>The scope of this recommendation includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Use of the ACDS Annual Survey 2022 (to be deployed in early 2023, with a report ready by March 31) to gather initial data on the current landscape of training offered across Alberta, including the training currently provided in house by service providers or accessed in other ways; consideration should be given to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Where there are strengths and challenges in the current approach, and– The delivery methods, risks and benefits, and costs of the methods used.– Engagement with the CDS sector to validate the findings from the survey,– Supplementation of data from the CDS sector to build out a full current state of training in the CDS sector in Alberta, and– Development of a gap analysis that identifies where needed training is not available and where some training may be provided in a way that is inefficient or burdensome to service providers.

Recommended Strategies

C. Developing the Workforce

Recommendation	Description
C9_E: Develop a provincial training framework	<p><i>Develop a training framework that addresses the gaps in training across the province and lays out a clear training path.</i></p> <p><i>This recommendation is dependent on completion of recommendation C9_D to develop a map of available training and conduct a gap analysis. There is also a dependency with recommendation A2 in terms of having a defined inventory of competencies.</i></p> <p>The scope of this recommendation includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Sector engagement to define the scope of the framework and prioritize competencies, required trainings and to identify training areas that could be consolidated for efficiency, – Development of a provincial training framework that lays out what training is mandatory describes pathways for training and builds in opportunity to identify efficiencies and potential training partnerships, and – Further engagement with the sector to validate the framework.
C9_F: Centralize training opportunities	<p><i>Create a clearing house for CDS sector training.</i></p> <p><i>This recommendation is dependent on completion of recommendation C9_D and C9_E to build a provincial training map and provincial training framework.</i></p> <p>The scope of this recommendation includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ACDS investigates options for clearing house platforms, and – ACDS sets up the clearing house platform based on the provincial training framework.
C9_G: Expand the suite of training offered by ACDS	<p><i>Expand the existing ACDS suite of training services provided.</i></p> <p><i>This recommendation is dependent on completion of recommendation C9_D, C9_E, and C9_F to build a provincial training map, provincial training framework and training clearing house.</i></p> <p>The scope of this recommendation includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ACDS designs and implements new training modules based on the gaps in existing training identified through the development of the provincial training framework, and – The new ACDS training is added to the clearing house.

Recommended Strategies

C. Developing the Workforce

Recommendation	Description
C10: Revisit PDD contract structure	<p><i>Revisit the PDD contract structure (1) to provide service providers with more flexibility in use of their funding to support their workforce and (2) to reflect the full / true costs of the workforce needed to deliver services.</i></p> <p>The scope of this recommendation includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Development of a series of deliverables intended to improve upon the existing PDD contract structure, including:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– A case for changing the contracts to include flexibility in use of service provider workforce,– A literature review on leading practices in funding community disability and innovation in similar service provider contracts that support flexibility in use of workforce,– Options for changes to the contract structure and impact analysis of those options,– Recommendations for the specific changes sought for the contracts, and– An implementation road map of how work could proceed to change the contract structure.
C11: Implement innovative workforce fund	<p><i>Work with SCSS to fund the design and implementation of a grant program that encourages CDS sector service providers to try new and innovative approaches to managing their workforce.</i></p> <p>The scope of this recommendation includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Design and implementation of a grant program that provides additional resources to service providers within the CDS sector that have demonstrated plans to implement innovative approaches to managing their workforce.

Recommended Strategies

Preliminary Timing

The proposed timing for each of the recommended strategies is provided below. This timing is subject to change based on future work on Project Blueprint CDS to co-design the development of an implementation plan for each recommendation.

Immediate Term	1 year	Short Term	2 years	Medium Term	3+ years	Long Term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A2. Build a shared understanding of the scope of practice of CDS sector services. - B6. Provide immediate and ongoing wage relief. - C9_D. Identify current state of training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A1. Build a shared understanding of the economic impact of the CDS sector. - A3. Adopt common workforce classifications. - A4. Adopt a network model to support cross-ministry coordination. - A5. Develop a forecasting model to support strategic workforce planning. - C9_B. Establish a system for micro-credentialing. - C9_E. Develop a provincial training framework. - C9_C. Expand the suite of training offered by ACDS. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - C9_A. Establish a target credential requirement for frontline CDS sector workers. - C9_F. Centralize training opportunities. - C10. Revisit PDD contract structure. - C11. Implement innovative workforce fund. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - B7. Build a wage scale guide for frontline service delivery staff. - B8. Engage CDS sector workers to co-design a community of practice. - C9_C. Expand post-secondary programming. 			

Next Steps

The remaining phase of work for Project Blueprint CDS includes co-designing an implementation plan with CDS sector service providers. The implementation plan will be completed in March 2023 and address all recommended strategies outlined in this document.

Figure 2: Project Blueprint CDS Overview

