

Suspension of Canada-Alberta Job Grant and the CDS Sector



Advocacy Brief

On August 7, 2024, the Government of Alberta unexpectedly announced the suspension of all new applications for the Canada-Alberta Job Grant program (CAJG) until March 31, 2025 [1]. The announcement is in response to the federal government ending, effective April 1, 2024, a temporary top-up provided to provinces and territories through bilateral Labour Market Transfer Agreements (LMTAs) since 2017. The suspension will result in a \$10 million drop in training funding for Alberta employers for 2024-25.

The suspension will have a devastating impact on workforce skill development plans of Community Disability Services (CDS) sector employers, already challenged with inflated operating costs and inadequate funding. Nearly 80% of organizations responding to our survey were planning on applying for the CAJG in the remainder of 2024-25 to subsidize mandatory training, specialized frontline training, or proficiency development in new and existing workers. On average, each of these organizations will now be short \$20,000, or almost 28% of their average training budget for 2024-25. This is a substantial amount in a sector where over 50% of organizations feel that their services are at moderate or high risk due to unfunded costs [2].

Reduced access to training can have serious implications for the safety of individuals with disabilities and the staff who support them, as well as risk program operations.

Approximately 80% of CAJG-subsidized funding benefits frontline workers and direct service supervisors in the CDS sector. Mandatory and other specialized frontline training enable organizations to meet accreditation requirements and support a growing number of individuals with diverse and complex support needs. Many organizations say they will be forced to access cheaper, potentially lower-quality sources for mandatory or essential training, and cancel most non-mandatory training. In addition to service delivery risk, general organizational risk is increased when supervisory and leadership staff have fewer opportunities to learn effective program management and oversight skills.



In a sector where wages are low, turnover is high, and burnout is prevalent, training is both a necessity and a key retention strategy. The average hourly wage for all positions in the CDS sector is \$23.03; 69% of all frontline workers make less than \$22.50/hr. Turnover for the past two years has been close to 30% [3]. 72% of service providers reported mental health as one of the top three issues affecting their workforce, and 63% listed employee burnout [4]. Under these challenging circumstances, access to training not only improves staff competency, it also boosts morale, self-confidence, and organizational attachment.

Since its inception in 2014, the CAJG has been both a financial life-saver for cash-strapped services, and an essential part of CDS workforce recruitment and retention strategies. Employers count on the CAJG to develop frontline skills to provide safe, quality supports, and to strengthen administrative competencies to run effective, publicly-funded operations.

Suspension of the CAJG threatens the survival of post-secondary disability studies programs already vulnerable due to low enrollment. Nearly 44% of respondents were planning to apply to the CAJG in the remainder of 2024-25 to support staff to take post-secondary courses. At Calgary's Bow Valley College, one of only two still offering disability studies programs in Alberta, the halt of the CAJG could impact 71 confirmed students in the 2023 and 2024 cohorts, and enrollment for January 2025 [5]. Without the CAJG's support, the CDS workforce risks losing such rare and vital sites of well-recognized, high-quality education.

Alberta's \$71 million drop in LMTA funding for 2024-25 could also impact other programs and services relevant to CDS sector workers and individuals receiving supports. In addition to the CAJG, the Canada-Alberta Workforce Development Agreement (part of the LMTA) funds several programs and services important to the CDS sector [6]. These include:

- Foundational Learning Assistance (FLA) program: helps students in need, including women, Indigenous peoples, newcomers, and people with disabilities, with educational and living costs while learning foundational employment skills. On August 29th, the Alberta government announced a \$34.7 million cut to this program. [7]
- Workforce Attraction and Retention Partnership Grants: supporting employer strategies and initiatives to plan and manage human resource needs [8]
- Skills development programs for individuals with disabilities: offered through Alberta Advanced Education, these include academic upgrading, basic skills, English as an Additional Language, Integrated Foundational Pathways, and Transitional Vocational Programs [6]
- Employment-related programs for individuals with disabilities: offered through Alberta Seniors, Community and Social Supports, these include Disability Related Employment Supports, PDD employment preparation and placement, and specialized assessments [6]

The CAJG’s sudden suspension is extremely concerning for Alberta’s CDS sector, which is already mired in chronic workforce challenges. Also worrisome are the broader impacts of the LMTA cuts on potential programs and services relevant to our sector.

We urge both levels of government to find both an immediate and a sustainable solution to ensure the continuation of these programs critical to the CDS sector. Specifically, we ask for:

- Reinstatement of funding for the CAJG until March 31, 2025, to address the lack of time for organizations to adapt their training priorities to funding reductions
- Ongoing funding for the CAJG effective April 1, 2025, with transparent funding levels, timelines, and processes so that organizations can prioritize their requests if funding is expected to be reduced in future years
- Review of other LMTA-funded programs to assess appropriate funding levels, and how confirmed or potential cuts might negatively impact workforce and safety in the CDS sector

In addition, we urge Alberta Seniors, Community and Social Services:

- To review training needs and required funding for their contracted disability service providers, and to ensure adequate funding is available through core contracts to address workforce needs and safety for individuals with disabilities
- To continue to support the work of ACDS to address key workforce issues, including training, through supporting the implementation of [Project Blueprint](#), the CDS sector comprehensive workforce strategy

“As a not-for-profit organization, we do all we can to make the work environment better for our employees that give so much of themselves to their jobs and our communities across Alberta.

While our contracts don't always allow us to show staff our appreciation through competitive wages, we strive to show how much our staff mean to us in other ways. The CAJG is one of the ways that we are able to show our staff appreciation through development of their skills and leadership potential - by investing in their futures. The loss of this grant will change the ways in which we can support development in our team.”



Expected Canada-Alberta Job Grant Funding in the Remainder of 2024-25

Average percentage of total operating budget for 2024-25 allocated to staff training
n=29

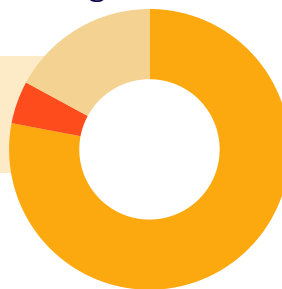
3.1%

Before it was put on hold, were organizations **planning on applying to the Canada-Alberta Job Grant (CAJG)** for staff training in the remainder of 2024-25? n=41

Yes
78%

No
5%

Unsure
17%



Average amount of funding organizations were planning to access through the CAJG for the remainder of the 2024-2025
n=26

\$20,000

On average, **expected CAJG funding for the remainder of the year** would have made up

28%

of CDS organizations' **entire 2024-25 training budget.**
n=25

26 responding organizations were planning on accessing over \$500,000 in training funding from the Canada-Alberta Job Grant; these funds must now be sourced from elsewhere within already-stretched service providers, or the training is at risk of being cancelled.

CAJG funding that organizations were **planning to access** in the remainder of the 2024-25 would have supported the following **training types** n=25

Mandatory
22%

training required for accreditation or other regulatory requirements

Specialized Frontline Supports
28%

non-mandatory but essential training to provide specialized frontline supports (e.g. aging and end of life)

Skill Development
50%

administrative, supervision, or leadership training



“We have a number of training plans for staff that will not be able to be completed and will impact our staff, our services, and [our] ability to maintain accreditation standards.”

How many employees would have benefitted from funding through CAJG in the remainder of 2024-25? n=28

Frontline
53%

Direct Service Supervision
29%

Leadership or Admin
17%



801

employees in 28 responding organizations will be **impacted by the cancellation of CAJG funding** over the remainder of 2024-25 n=28

“With this access to funding taken away, we will see a significant decrease in professional development among our staff. We encourage employees to continuously upgrade their knowledge and skills through this training program, and advertise this as a benefit in recruitment and talent acquisition. Unfortunately, our quality of service will be impacted long-term from a decrease in access to training dollars.”

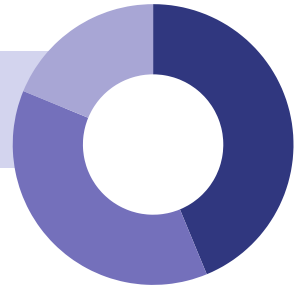
Post-Secondary Training

Were organizations **planning on using the CAJG** to fund staff to attend **post-secondary disability services programs or courses** in the remainder of 2024-25? n=32

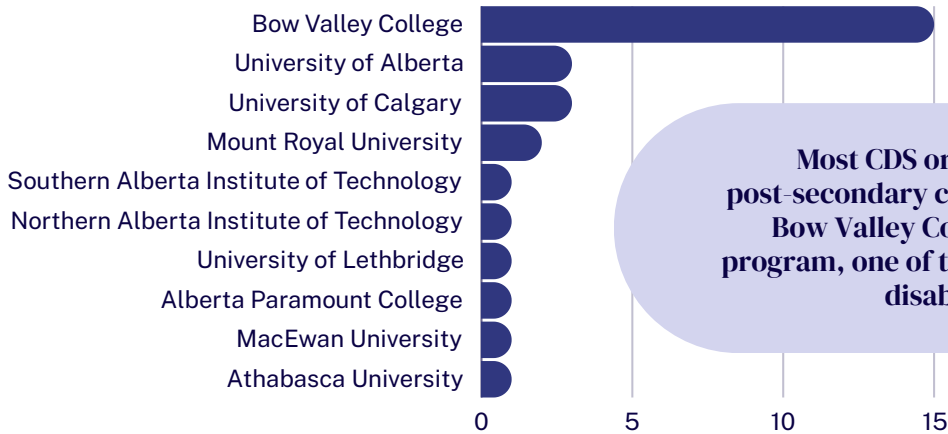
Yes
44%

No
38%

Unsure
19%



Number of Organizations Sending Employees to Study at Post-Secondary Institutes n=19



Most CDS organizations utilizing the CAJG for post-secondary courses had enrolled employees in Bow Valley College's Disability Studies Diploma program, one of the few remaining post-secondary disability studies programs in Alberta.

Average amount organizations were still **expecting to access in CAJG funding** to assist employees accessing **post-secondary courses and programs in 2024-25** n=11

\$12,550

\$138,000

Total amount these 11 responding organizations were **expecting to access for post-secondary training** over the remainder of the year

“As a not-for-profit, the Canada-Alberta Job Grant has provided our staff with opportunities to further education and increase skills development and knowledge. It has provided opportunities for staff growth within the organization and allows for the ability to stay within the fiscal budget, and give staff opportunities within the workplace for learning.”

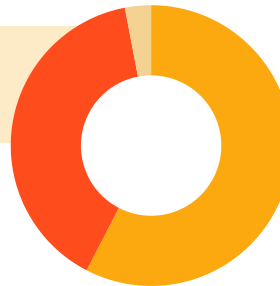
The **number of employees** across 18 organizations whose **post-secondary programming will be impacted** due to the cancellation of the CAJG n=18

138

Canada-Alberta Job Grant Funding Received So Far in 2024-25

Percentage of organizations that have already received CAJG funding in the 2024-25 fiscal year n=33

Yes 58% No 39% Unsure 3%



Types of training supported by CAJG funding already received in 2024-25 n=25

Mandatory 19% Specialized Frontline Supports 30% Skill Development 51%

training required for accreditation or other regulatory requirements

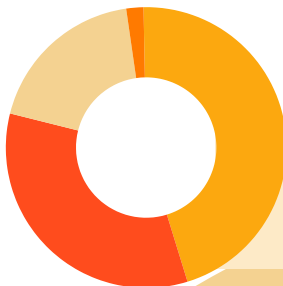
non-mandatory but essential training to provide specialized frontline supports (e.g. aging and end of life)

administrative, supervision, or leadership training



Which staff have already benefitted from CAJG funding in the 2024-25 fiscal year? n=14

Frontline 46% Direct Service Supervision 34% Leadership or Admin 19% Other 2%



“The agency will experience impacts in the following areas:

1. Training resource limitations can lead to a decrease in staff motivation, morale, and engagement with the agency's program goals. This can result in a loss of faith in the agency's performance review process due to the inability to support their development goals. A lack of training resources can make staff feel less confident in their roles and their career path, leading to a perceived lack of commitment from the agency and a reduction in their commitment to the agency and their expected role outcomes.

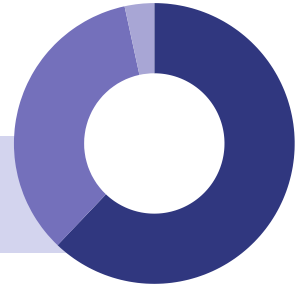
2. Number 1 leads to increased employee turnover.

3. Training resource limitations can also reduce the high level of quality service standards the agency is known for, potentially leading to increased safety concerns due to staff being inadequately trained.”

Canada-Alberta Job Grant Funding in 2023-24

Percentage of organizations that received CAJG funding last year, in 2023-24 n=29

Yes 62% **No 36%** **Unsure 3%**



For organizations accessing **CAJG funding last year**, the grant made up

30%

of their **entire 2023-24 training budget.**

n=14

Types of training supported by CAJG funding received in 2023-24 n=15

Mandatory 11%

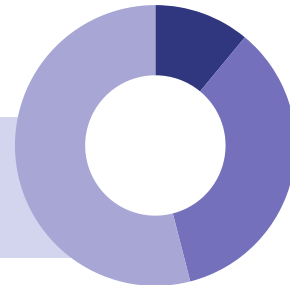
Specialized Frontline Supports 35%

Skill Development 54%

training required for accreditation or other regulatory requirements

non-mandatory but essential training to provide specialized frontline supports (e.g. aging and end of life)

administrative, supervision, or leadership training



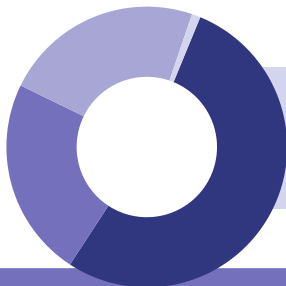
Which staff benefitted from CAJG funding in 2023-24? n=14

Frontline 53%

Direct Service Supervision 23%

Leadership or Admin 23%

Other 1%



CAJG funding has helped many employees across the CDS sector access training in a wide variety of areas, including:

- First Aid
- Medicine Administration
- Nonviolent Crisis Intervention
- Conflict Resolution
- Strategic Planning
- Leadership and Succession Planning

“Our agency [will] not be able to support employees [to] enroll for courses/trainings that will enhance their skill set [...] and make a difference to the lives of the individuals they serve.

This is very vital to us.”

References and Notes

- [1] Government of Alberta. August 7, 2024. "Federal government cuts funding for Alberta workers: Minister Jones." News Release. Alberta.ca. alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=90793C746CFF6-088D-7351-248E476155BC736F
- [2] Alberta Council of Disability Services (ACDS). January 2024. *Sector Scanner 2023: Summary Report*. ACDS.ca. acds.ca/files/Resources/Sector%20Scanner%202023%20-%20Summary.pdf
- [3] ACDS. 2024. ACDS Survey 2023: Workforce Fundamentals. Calgary, AB. ACDS.ca. acds.ca/workforce/annual-workforce-survey/index.html
- [4] ACDS. January 2024. *Sector Scanner 2023*. Calgary, AB. ACDS.ca. acds.ca/files/Resources/Sector%20Scanner%202023_Jan%202024.pdf
- [5] Bow Valley College, Disability Studies. August 28, 2024. Personal communication with ACDS.
- [6] Alberta Jobs, Economy and Trade. April 29, 2024. *Canada-Alberta Workforce Development Agreement: 2022/2023 Annual Report*. ISBN 978-1-4601-6035-0 | ISSN 2562-7996. open.alberta.ca/publications/canada-alberta-workforce-development-agreement-annual-report-to-albertans
- [7] Government of Alberta. August 29, 2024. "Ottawa cuts funding for Alberta's vulnerable students: Minister Sawhney." News Release. Alberta.ca. alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=90900340819DF-F3F2-700C-885A93DD51BF4C8C
- [8] Government of Alberta. Accessed August 23, 2024. "Workforce Partnerships Grants." Alberta.ca. alberta.ca/workforce-partnerships-grants

Survey Methods

The survey population consisted of all agencies that are "full organizational ACDS members" (122 organizations as of August 26, 2024). These organizations are contracted directly by PDD to provide community-based supports to adults with developmental disabilities across Alberta.

Survey data was collected through Survey Monkey from August 12, 2024 to August 19, 2024. From 63 responses received, removing repeated organizations or responses that provided no further information past the first question, left a total of 43 valid responses analyzed, for a response rate of 35%.

Completed surveys were analyzed by a single contact at ACDS and stripped of identifying information in this document to remain confidential. Data was analyzed in MS-Excel.

Respondents had an average of 175 employees working in their organization, representing a total of 7,334 employees. Each survey respondent had an average of 187 individuals accessing services at their organization, representing 7,672 individuals across Alberta.

The total number of respondents for each question (represented with n) differs throughout the survey depending on the number of respondents who either chose to respond, or for whom the question was relevant (e.g. respondents who indicated that they had not received CAJG funding in 2023-24 were not asked what amount of funding they received).

Thank you to those who took the time to complete the survey; our advocacy is possible thanks to you.

