

What other sector or industry profession would you compare your position to?

Workers responding to ADWA’s 2022 survey were asked the following question: “What other sector or industry professions would you compare your position to?” We received a wide variety of responses to this question. The jobs to which the workers compared their positions could be roughly divided into the following areas.

- Health care workers (nurses, health care aides, nursing home workers, mental health supports)
- Social workers, therapists/psychologists/behaviour support specialists
- Job coaches/employment preparation
- Cooks/food preparation/hospitality
- Leadership/supervisory roles
- Security/police/correctional officers
- Educators/teachers/special education assistants
- Cleaners/housekeeping
- Administration/HR/IT/accountants
- Child and youth care workers
- Driver/chauffeurs



Overwhelmingly, people who responded to our survey compared their jobs to at least one other job in the medical/healthcare sector (approximately 2/3 of the sample). Most predominantly, nursing was identified, from RN to LPN to nurse’s aide. Also, many identified the jobs as being similar to health care aids and attendants, nursing home staff, hospital staff and various other health-related professions. Here are just a few examples how respondents compared their work to other professions.

Health Care Aide or an LPN

Alberta Health Services (Nurses and Aides) and Mental Health Professionals

Health care worker, recreational therapist

Nursing in the continuing care facilities caring for elderly people

Personal care--nursing, mental health

Nurse, minus they don't have to restrain clients

Health care aide in a full care facility

Recreation therapy assistant + nursing attendant + physio therapy assistant—some days it can be one of those, but most days it's all three. We help them to maintain mobility, creating recreation activities for our individuals and helping them achieve their personal goals, as well as perform duties of a nursing attendant.

*Home care, health care, assisted care, dietary, housekeeping, etc.
Community healthcare; I've worked as a primary care paramedic and see some comparable aspects.*

Care aide/psych nurse/LPN/rec aide & therapy

A very significant number of the respondents identified their jobs as being similar to other community-based sectors. This includes a variety of mental health support positions and workers in other sectors that provide mental health, group homes and care services (e.g., children's and youth services, senior's care, addiction group home supports, etc.).

Distress center, mental health care, EMS, police, and shelter worker

Counsellors, social workers, addiction workers, mental health workers etc.

It is a combination of front line-support, resource gathering, and administrative duties. It would be comparable to a social workers duties.

When working with complex clients that most likely will come from Alberta hospital to our care, I'd have to say we are similar to Alberta health care workers, as we do a lot of what they do and get training to make sure we can do our jobs.

Most people though identified job roles that encompassed a variety of different occupations crossing different working sectors.

It's a combination of multiple professions. Teacher, psychologist, event planner, cook, driver, nurse, police officer. Deescalating extreme behaviours, being able to not hold a grudge after being mentally, physically or emotionally abused is extremely difficult and should be compensated accordingly.

Educator, health care provider, cook, house keeper, transporter, etc.

I don't work front line as often now in my current role, but when I do it encompasses a few different roles; nursing, seniors care, coaching, teaching, and mentoring.

Peace officer, healthcare aid, LPN/nurse, counselor, life coach, nanny, cab driver, private investigator.

Personal care attendant, teacher's aide, professional organizer, personal shopper, mental health support.

In my current role I do front line work, community support, training and education, human resources, and much more. I don't know of anywhere it compares except maybe teaching?

In our roles we are expected to wear many different hats throughout our work day. We are a caregiver, a companion, a teacher, that listening ear, cook, cleaner, and so many other things. Other professions base their wages on being skilled on the specifics of that title. Our job requires us to know and be able to do a little of all those components.

A number of workers have said that the work in this sector has no comparison to other sectors. This is probably related to the range of education, training, skills and practices required by workers in the sector. The duties significantly overlap with many different jobs and professions. This is especially the case for community disability support workers as they have often noted that government and other sector workers do not have the range of duties and expectations in one position.

It's incomparable as I see our work as a unique job.

There really isn't another job too similar to this one. There's a little bit of everything involved when working in what we do. We handle finances, hygiene, medications, grocery shopping, house cleaning, and etc. There's nothing quite like it.

Cook/baker/dishwasher/laundry/maintenance/administrator/facilitator...list goes on... Let's be real we do multiple jobs within one, we are cooks, cleaners, med administrators, counsellors, crisis workers, admin work (with multiple expectations for excellent documentation to be maintained), advocates, shoppers, maintenance workers at times due to client tight budgets, and support workers while juggling all the other needs!... I can't think of another industry that expects a staff to do all that for next to minimum wage!! EG: Hospital staff (LPN) are not expected to do patients laundry, cook for them and counsel them on a daily/hourly basis.

Not sure, we kind of fall into a weird category, it's not exactly health care, but it's a lot different than most jobs.

As the disability field is a unique position in my opinion it is hard to compare it to other professions. The best comparison I believe would be a registered nurse crossed with a teacher. We are involved in day to day life commonly providing medical care, and we are working on teaching, enhancing, and working with existing skills that an individual possesses. We are expected to follow government guidelines, but with minimal support or acknowledgement from the government, and typically we are involved with a multidisciplinary team not only as an agency but with each individual that we support. There are a lot of components involved in the field that makes it hard to compare to other professions as I do not know any other professions first hand that have as many stakeholders, professional, and community involvements.

Summary Observations

Variety in roles

Many people commented on the varied roles expected for them to perform within their jobs. There is not one specific job description with a defined skill set for the Community Disability Services Worker (CDSW). Even though our community will often use the terms front-line or direct-support workers, those workers may be providing a vastly different kind of service. A direct-support worker could be providing all of the supports needed to help an individual to live in their home (e.g., cooking, cleaning, shopping, banking, paying bills, driving, home and yard maintenance, etc.), to find and keep a job in the community (e.g., employment preparation, job coaching, liaison with employers, etc.), to earn an educational qualification (e.g., attending classes, taking notes, studying support, transportation, etc.), to

live in a hospital, long-term care or mental health facility (e.g., personal care, medication administration, mental health coaching, security-type duties, dementia-related supports, filling in documentation, etc.), to access community resources or take part in community-based activities (e.g., recreational coordination, support to go to medical appointments, travel, facilitating inclusion in religious or community organizations, etc.), to interpret communication (e.g., ASL interpreters, supporting those who use communication devices, etc.), and much more. Each of those tasks may require a different skill set and skill level which will vary depending on the individual being supported.

Second, the CDS sector prides itself on doing what is necessary to meet the needs of the individuals. Job descriptions will be expanded or contracted based on the individual's needs. For example, if someone requires total personal care due to physical or medical disabilities, the work is more likely to resemble a health care aide. It may also include nursing-type supports if they require catheter changes, complex tube feeding, wound care, insulin injections and other more medical-type procedures. If the person being supported has complex mental health issues with accompanying behavioural challenges, the work may have more overlap with that of a police officer, security guard or other first responder. If the individual needs support to find a job, the work may be more like that of a job coach or a teacher. If the individual needs support for community access, it may look more like that of a community development worker, chauffeur or a recreational therapist or practitioner. If the person needs help living in their home and they do not have high medical or physical support needs, it may look more like a personal assistant, chef, a cleaner or a restaurant worker. The added complexity in this sector is that the very same worker could be performing three or more of these different types of supports when working at multiple sites within one organization, or for multiple employers. The workers could all be classified as CDSWs, and be set at the same wage, but their job duties and skill expectations could be completely different.

In practice, the above means it is very difficult to articulate what CDSW's do in their work. An individual may be performing SOME but not ALL of the job duties of a nurse, a therapist, a first responder, a secretary, an advocate, a chef, a cleaner, a healthcare aid, a teacher, a life skills coach, a mediator and an office assistant, sometimes in one eight-hour shift and for more than one person at a time.

Certification

ADWA has been working for years to develop a certification process for the workers in this sector, starting with the direct-service support positions. Considering the situation described above, this is not a simple task with easily defined job descriptions, especially for the direct-service worker position. There are some characteristics that are common within the variety of required tasks of those working in the sector are expected to perform. For example, you need to have good communication skills to be able to write a useful summary of a doctor's visit to ensure the whole team knows what took place, to facilitate the inclusion of someone into a new place of worship, to deescalate a person who is having a difficult day, to teach a complex new task to an individual, to complete required government paperwork, etc. You need to have good advocacy skills to support someone who is being denied access to necessary services, to help someone who is having a negative encounter with the police, to support someone who is estranged from their family but who wants to reconnect, etc. Categorizing these underlying skills, such as good communication and advocacy skills, which run across varied direct-support positions, was the goal of the pilot project for certification. Identifying the necessary range of skills required for this work is the foundation in establishing the professional role and identity of the community disability service worker.

Other workers in the sector

When we are advocating for reasonable compensation for the sector, we often refer to the direct-service positions. These are certainly the bulk of the positions in the sector, making up probably 80-90% of the workforce in any particular organization (varies depending on the kinds of supports offered by an organization). That being said, Community Disability Services (CDS) are complete organizations. A large CDS service needs the same positions as any other large business or organization in the community. This will include an array of human resource and administrative positions, accountants, IT specialists, leadership positions (e.g., coordinators, managers, directors, executive directors) etc. Additionally, many organizations in the sector have other specialist positions, such as nurses, psychologists, behavioural therapists/supports, and others to support the vast array of services provided by their organization. All of these positions have direct equivalents in government and private sector organizations which are easily compared. For example, a CEO leading an organization with 500 staff and overseeing a \$30 million budget would be facing similar job roles and responsibilities as a CEO running a medium to large manufacturing facility.

Here's how some of those leaders compare their jobs.

Any sector that supervises a large number of staff who work anytime of the day every day.

Any Director-COO that oversees all services in a business that is required to have a degree and 20 plus years' experience in their sector and overseeing and being responsible for 300 plus employees.

Any managerial profession where you are charged with people's lives and supervising employees, managing budgets and following contract responsibilities.

Childcare manager, store manager, team leader/supervisor/manager in any industry. There is a high level of staff management, scheduling, coaching, quality service/control, training/orientation, hiring, disciplinary actions, and mild-moderate accounting for budgets, timesheets, etc.

Hospital administrative staff. We are expected to have a degree to do this job which is the same amount of education (or more depending on level) you need to be a nurse or a unit clerk. Both of these get better pay than my position even at the entry level.

Every one of these positions have direct comparisons to jobs available in other sectors. The range of skill is easily transferable. The leadership, administrative and specialist positions receive higher wages than the direct-service positions (sometimes only marginally), but they are not funded at rates that are competitive with other sectors. Also, most of these jobs are paid a salary with the expectation that the worker will put in many more hours than they are being paid for, resulting in an hourly wage equivalent that may be lower than the people they are leading. With the comparatively poor wages for all workers, our sector is in danger of losing both direct front line and other organization staff. These losses could critically endanger the essential supports provided by our sector. This means that even though the workers repeatedly state that they love their work, when the situation gets as bad as it is right now they have other opportunities available.