

Disability Worker Questions for Alberta Election Candidates

Unskilled Wages for Skilled Work	Added Costs for Underpaid Workers	Impacts of Burnout & Turnover	Lack of Educational Opportunities	Appropriate Wages
<p>Alberta disability workers apply multidisciplinary skills (e.g., teacher, coach, social worker, advocate, employment counsellor, community developer, researcher, personal care attendant) to successfully support individuals with intellectual, physical and/or emotional disabilities to be fully part of their communities.</p> <p>Yet community disability workers earned an average of \$18.76/hour in 2016, \$3.20/hour less than disability workers in government.</p> <p>Government contracts with agencies and families have not included any increases to worker compensation since 2014, while the complexity of individuals' needs continues to increase.</p> <p>Starting wages for disability workers (2016 median = \$16.05/hr) now equal those of fast food workers who have less skill and responsibility.</p>	<p>In addition to low wages, disability workers are often expected to pay expenses associated with carrying out services, either temporarily or permanently, such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities with entry fees or meal costs that are not waived for companions and are unaffordable for individuals with disabilities on limited incomes. • Transportation costs to appointments and community activities that prevent the individual from becoming isolated, particularly in smaller urban areas without public transportation. <p>Mileage costs, if covered by the employer, often have monthly caps and/or low reimbursement rates that do not cover vehicle wear and tear.</p>	<p>A 2015 ADWA study showed that 25% of disability workers have 2 or more jobs in the field to make ends meet. The more hours worked, the less time disability workers have for self-care and renewal, or for their families. This increases the risk of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service errors due to fatigue • Impaired problem solving and reduced creativity and effort on behalf of individuals • Stress and health issues • Burnout and turnover <p>Individuals with disabilities need consistency in their support to achieve their life goals and maintain a place in the community. Turnover rates have consistently averaged near 30% for many years. Those leaving say they cannot afford to stay in the field when less stressful work pays the same or better.</p>	<p>The most effective way to develop the multi-disciplinary skills and knowledge required for successful disability work is to complete relevant post-secondary education, supplemented by continuous professional development.</p> <p>Since 2008, nine Alberta post-secondary programs preparing front-line disability workers have closed, leaving only Bow Valley College and a planned Norquest College program. Many private programs training disability workers have also closed.</p> <p>The number of seats in current programs cannot keep up with turnover. As well, wages in the sector are too low to pay back student loans, which is a disincentive to get an education in the field.</p> <p>Government contracts with agencies and families do not include staff training costs.</p>	<p>What will you do to raise the wages of skilled disability workers?</p>
				<p>What will you do to make sure that disability workers are no longer burdened with the hidden costs of providing services (e.g., transportation, entry fees, meal costs)?</p>
				<p>What will you do to fix the underlying causes of high burnout and turnover among disability workers?</p>
				<p>What will you do to make sure that disability workers are able to afford and access the education and training they need throughout their career to provide effective support to individuals with disabilities?</p>