



ACDS 2019 Annual Conference
Positioning for New Realities

Conference Backgrounder

Alberta Council of Disability Services (ACDS) 2019 Annual Conference

Conference Theme Positioning for New Realities

Dates May 13-14, 2019

Venue Calgary Best Western Premier Plaza Hotel and Conference Centre, 1316 33 St NE Calgary

Conference Value Statement The 2019 conference will identify and explore the current and emerging realities in the community disability sector in Alberta and equip participants with the knowledge and tools to support them in their service provision. It will also assist organizational leaders to think strategically about the emerging landscape of community disability services and allow them to move forward in the context of these new realities.

Our conference goal is to provide a strong learning experience that focuses on sharing knowledge and expertise from a range of speakers and presenters with concurrent sessions customized to leadership (executives and senior management), middle-management and front-line staff.

Sessions in the leadership stream will include learning and workshop opportunities for sector leaders to engage together in developing innovative responses to challenges. These sessions will be restricted to senior leadership of organizations.

Conference Participants Up to 350 delegates are expected to attend, including front-line staff, managers and executives from the community disability sector primarily in Alberta.

Conference Format Plenary sessions will be targeted to all participants. Concurrent sessions will be offered in two streams: a leadership and general stream.

What are the new realities impacting the community disability sector in Alberta?

1. **The Individual:** More than ever before, agencies are supporting an aging population and individuals with complex and ultra-complex needs. The latter may have a developmental disability along with co-occurring mental health issues, challenging behaviours, opioid and similar significant addictions, as well as histories of criminal activity. For the ultra-complex individuals, the focus is on maintaining health and safety concurrently with work on recovery, while maintaining integration within the community in a meaningful way. This emerging population requires significantly more resources and highly qualified staff.



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2. **The Workforce:** Low wages and demanding work have made the community disability sector less attractive to students preparing for the workforce. Most post-secondary institutions in Alberta have stopped offering certificate or degree programs in community disability services due to low student enrollment. Service providers have few qualified young people to recruit as experienced ones retire or shrink their work roles. When new staff are hired, many often need training in some of the most basic skills needed to work in this sector.

As the scope of services has expanded to include an increasing number of aging individuals and individuals with multiple and complex needs, so has the need for highly-skilled staff. In addition, turnover due to retirement of senior leadership is accelerating with impacts to organizational and practice knowledge and creates the need to equip and support new leadership.

3. **New Technologies:** While new technologies support the efficiency of and advance our workplaces in the sector, they also come with some challenges and risks. One risk is associated with the under-utilization of technologies. Many service providers are unaware of or currently not utilizing the technology available for case planning or for efficient human resource management. Some service providers continue to work on pre-owned computers and lack the resources to upgrade. What technologies would benefit the sector? Do the benefits outweigh the upfront costs associated with some new technologies? How can we effectively utilize new technologies to advance our workplaces and service provision?
4. **Funding Structures:** Current funding structures lack flexibility and do not fully cover costs associated with providing quality supports. More individuals are falling through the gaps, either by not being able to secure additional services when needed (for example, when a crisis occurs or an individual becomes palliative) or when individuals do not meet the narrow parameters of the set criteria (for example, when they fall outside of the IQ cut-off, or when individuals have significant co-existing disabilities and mental illness).
5. **Increasing Diversity:** Our workplaces and our clients are increasingly diverse. Alberta has experienced tremendous growth in the diversity of our population in recent years. Our country is home to an increasing number of newcomers from around the world. Our Aboriginal population is also increasing. In addition to the rapidly growing cultural diversity, more individuals in the community disability sector workforce and those receiving supports are identifying themselves as



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Conference Backgrounder

members of the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer) community. How can we create more welcoming and inclusive workplaces? What knowledge and tools do service providers need to support diverse individuals?

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Keynote speakers, presenters, workshops and group discussions will be catalysts for discussions about topics such as:

The Individual

- Complex needs
- Mental health
- Safety and self-care, including legal changes around safety
- Models of support, risk mitigation in inclusive settings
- The inability of agencies to support uptake of challenging individuals
- Intake methods (the need to have robust intake methods)
- Agency risk management
- Sharing best practices
- Seniors (aging with dignity)
- Family Managed Services (What does it involve? Respecting and offering choice in service provision)

The Workforce

- Workforce development
- Training opportunities and certification
- Succession planning (for example, to address the lack of middle management)
- Developing future leaders
- Collaborative opportunities with post-secondary opportunities
- Health and safety



ACDS 2019 Annual Conference
Positioning for New Realities

Conference Backgrounder

Technology

- Opportunities to create efficiencies in the sector
- Bridging the skill gap with technology
- Social media use
- Human resource management tools
- Accreditation digitization
- Utilising on-line training opportunities
- Technology disruption

Funding Structures

- The importance of representative and quality data to plan for service needs
- Collective advocacy
- Social enterprise and business models

Diversity

- Cultural competency
- Aboriginal cultural awareness
- Respectful and inclusive workplace practices

Topics that intersect and can support the sector to position itself for all new realities identified above

- Collective advocacy to influence change
- Leadership engagement
- Collaborations and partnerships
- Innovation in the sector



Vision

People with disabilities live full lives as citizens supported by a vibrant network of services in their communities

Mission

ACDS is the collective voice of our members, advancing excellence and best practices, advocating for effective public policy, and championing disability services