



ACWS Shelter Workforce Survey 2019-2020 – Fact Sheet

ACWS and its members have been committed to and continue to cultivate a skilled, well supported, professional workforce to effectively serve the needs of women, children and seniors fleeing domestic violence. The findings of our 2019-20 workforce survey have provided valuable insight into shelters' experiences with operations and staffing.

History: ACWS has administered 6 surveys on shelter operations, funding, staff compensation and working conditions across Alberta's women's shelters since 2002.

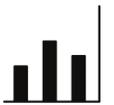
2019-2020 Survey: 24 member organizations participated, consisting of 29 shelters and 712 employees. All 3 types of shelters and geographic regions were represented.¹



Gendered Experience: Domestic violence shelter workers in Alberta were **97% female** in 2019, significantly higher than other female-majority industries such as health care and social assistance (82.4%), educational services (69.3%), and accommodation and food services (58.5%).²

Since March of 2020, women's participation in the Canadian workforce has fallen to a level last seen in 1986.³ Economists have expressed concern that these losses could take decades to regain unless governments adopt a gendered approach to their economic recovery plans.

Funding Model: Over the years women's organizations across Canada had to become more reliant on short-term grants and private donations, contributing to scarce financial resources, mission dilution to align with multiple funder/donor mandates and increased administrative burdens to meet multiple reporting requirements.⁴



COVID-19: Alberta's women's shelters' COVID-19 experiences have been highly gendered. Many have struggled with staffing as their female employees juggled professional and personal caregiving responsibilities. Many are confronting financial strain from additional operational burdens (e.g., illness-prevention measures and funder reporting) and lost revenue, which they rely on more as women-serving organizations.

Shelters reported reductions up to \$100,000 in fundraised dollars.



According to the *Alberta 2019 Wage & Salary Survey*, Alberta's women's shelter workforce

- earned less in terms of both salary and hourly wage and
- worked longer hours than the average worker in an equivalent role in the non-profit and public sectors.

Although salaries in women's shelters have increased year over year since 2015-16, shelters' average work weeks have increased over this same period of time. When compensation is adjusted for hours worked, year-over-year increases are lower for many positions.

All shelters experience high turnover rates, possibly due to the high stress associated with the line of work as well as lower pay scales and benefits than that of government.

Recommendations:

- 1. Robust Funding Model for Women-Serving Organizations.** Women's shelters provide an essential service for their communities. Yet they still tend to rely on fundraised dollars more than the average non-profit organization in Alberta. More stable funding models are needed to ensure future quality and availability of women-focused services.⁵
- 2. Accessible Childcare.** Affordability of childcare is consistently cited as a major barrier to women's participation in the labour force.⁶ It has been a staffing concern for shelters throughout the pandemic. Improved access to affordable childcare is a measure that can be taken to retain employees and, more generally, promote women's participation in the workforce.
- 3. Funding for Benefits Specific to Women.** Women's shelters providing benefits that acknowledge factors in women's life experiences that contribute to the gender wage gap might be particularly effective in impacting gender equality. These benefits add costs, but should be considered an investment towards improved population-level well-being. Government funding for these benefits could present a gendered strategy in the pandemic recovery.

¹ It should be noted that in this particular survey there was an underrepresentation of Calgary shelters.

² Alberta Council of Women's Shelters ACWS Shelter Workforce Survey 2019-20 (2021)

³ Stroh, P. (2020, August 17). [Pandemic threatens to wipe out decades of progress for working mothers](#). CBC News.

⁴ Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women. (2017). [Funding for Women's Organizations](#).

⁵ Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women. (2020). [Over half of Canadian's women's sector forced to reduce or cancel vital services](#).

⁶ Patterson, M. (2018). [Who works part time and why?](#) Statistics Canada.