



Summary: ACWS Shelter Workforce Survey 2019-2020

Alberta Council of Women's Shelters
04-07-2021

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Acknowledgements

Traditional Lands

ACWS acknowledges the traditional lands upon which we live, work, and play. We recognize that all Albertans are Treaty people and have a responsibility to understand our history so that we can learn from the past, be aware of the present, and create a just and caring future. ACWS celebrates and values the resiliency, successes, and teachings that Alberta's Indigenous people have shown us, as well as the unique contributions of every Albertan. The ACWS office is located on Treaty 6 land, which is the traditional territory of the Plains Cree and an ancient gathering place of many Indigenous peoples for thousands of years. These lands have also been home to and a central trading place of the Blackfoot, Nakota, Assiniboine, Dene, and the Métis people of western Canada. We honour the courage and strength of Indigenous women. We honor them as life givers and care givers as we honor and learn from their continuing achievements, their consistent strength, and their remarkable endurance. Our members – and the participating shelters in this project - serve all nations and all peoples; they are located on Treaty 6, 7 and 8 lands across this province which include the six Metis regions of Alberta.

Contributors

We thank all the shelter directors, committee members and staff who submitted the information needed to compile the report, and by extension, this summary. The report was prepared by Cat Van Wielingen & Amy Mercure for the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters.

Scope of Report

This is the public summary of the confidential full ACWS member ACWS Shelter Workforce Survey Report 2019-20.

Other Data Sources

Alberta Disability Services¹

Since 2009, ACDS Annual Workforce Surveys have provided vital information about Alberta's Community Disability Services (CDS) workforce. For 2019, this sector's workforce survey was completed by 44 ACDS member organizations and 7,254 workers.

¹ Alberta Council of Disability Services. (2020). [ACDS 2019 Workforce Survey](#). Calgary, AB

Alberta Labour Force Statistics²

The 2019 Annual Alberta Labour Market review provides statistics and trends in Alberta's labour market and how it compares to other provinces. Topics include, employment, unemployment, migration, industry, occupation, education, Indigenous people off-reserve and demographics.

Statistics Canada³

Several analyses in this year's report reference labour force data from 1998-2018 on women's labour force experiences.

About ACWS

ACWS

ACWS is the provincial network organization of women's shelters in Alberta. Today, ACWS supports 41 members operating 54 shelters across the province for women, children, and seniors facing domestic abuse.⁴ We support our members and work with them to end domestic violence through culture-shifting violence prevention programs, collective data and research, and front-line training. With support from ACWS, Alberta shelters are helping to provide safety, support families, and improve communities.

ACWS's mission to end violence against women is the foundation of our four charitable objects, designed to:

- Develop a coordinated, collaborative response to family violence that is comprehensive and responsive.
- Initiate, conduct, and/or participate in research relating to the causes, impacts, and prevention of family violence, and elimination of violence against women, children, and seniors, such as the ACWS annual Data Release and Inventory of Promising Practices in Alberta.
- Educate and train the public and professionals about prevention of, and responses to, intimate partner and elder abuse through initiatives such as Leading Change.
- Coordinate funding and improve services in order to better meet the needs of abused women, their children, and abused seniors.

² Labour and Immigration, Government of Alberta. (2020, July). [Annual Alberta Labour Market Review](#).

³ Statistics Canada. (2019, October). [The gender wage gap in Canada: 1998 to 2018](#).

⁴ The number of members and shelters are current as of the publication of this report. These numbers may vary slightly year to year and will differ from those presented in our findings, which reflect members and their shelters who participated in the 2019-20 survey.

ACWS Members

ACWS members deliver services using a variety of programs which include residential services provided at emergency and second stage shelters as well as community-based services such as outreach, follow-up, and public education programs. Shelters receive funding from the three orders of government: mainly the province but also from federal and municipal governments depending on the shelter. Many shelters have longstanding funding relationships dating back over 25 years. However, government funding differs widely between shelters and largely depends upon shelter type and government priorities.

Summary

Background


The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS) and its members have been committed to and continue to cultivate a skilled, well supported, and professional workforce to effectively serve the needs of women, children and seniors fleeing domestic violence. ACWS has administered six Shelter Workforce surveys on shelter operations, funding, staff compensation and working conditions across Alberta's women's shelters since 2002.

Sample Information

Twenty-four member organizations participated in the 2020 Shelter Workforce Survey, consisting of 29 shelters and 712 employees. All three types of shelters and geographic regions were represented; however, it should be noted that no emergency shelters and only one of three second-stage shelters from Calgary participated.

Table 1: Regional Distribution of Shelters and Employees

Region	Number of Shelters	Number of Employees
Central	6	133
Edmonton	5	181
Northeast	6	111
Northwest	5	104
South	6	143
Calgary	1	40
Total	29	712



A total of 19 directors participated in discussions of shelter pandemic experiences over the month of August. Information gathered in subsequent engagement sessions has been incorporated into this summary as well.

COVID-19

COVID-19 has highlighted many fault lines within Canadian society that have resulted in already-marginalized groups suffering disproportionately from the pandemic's short and long-term impacts. Through various phases of government restrictions, women have been more likely to lose employment and, with continued economic uncertainty and reduced access to community-based supports, are struggling to return to work. Since March, women's participation in the Canadian workforce has fallen to a level last seen in 1986.⁵ Economists have expressed concern that these losses could take decades to regain unless governments adopt a gendered approach to their economic recovery plans.⁶

As employers of a female-majority workforce in a feminized sector, 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. And, like their colleagues across the non-profit sector, many are confronting the 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.⁷

General Impacts of COVID-19 on women's labour force experiences in Canada

In 2015, "around 56 per cent of women were employed in occupations involving the '5 Cs': caring, clerical, catering, cashiering and cleaning, placing them at increased risk of exposure to COVID-19 and more likely to lose income as a result of public health measures enacted by governments to contain the illness."⁸

⁵ Stroh, P. (2020, August 17). [Pandemic threatens to wipe out decades of progress for working mothers](#). CBC News.

⁶ Canadian Human Rights Commission. (2020, April 30). [Statement - Canada's social and economic recovery efforts must take a feminist approach](#) [Press release].

⁷ YWCA Canada. (2020). [Women's Sector at Risk of Financial Devastation: Implications for Canada's COVID-19 Recovery](#).

⁸ Scott, K., & Macdonald, D. (2020, December 18). [Behind the Numbers: Looking at COVID-19 Through an LFS Lens](#) [Blog post].



Staffing Challenges

Shelters have experienced a significant reduction in their staffing levels during the pandemic, citing the following reasons:

- Staff have been unable to be on-site because either they or their children are exhibiting symptoms, because they or their family members are immunocompromised, because of school and childcare closures, or due to fear of contracting COVID-19 and introducing the virus to their families.
- The pandemic has mounted pressures for employees with care providing responsibilities, resulting in increased absenteeism and staff turnover.

Shelters have responded to these staffing challenges in several ways that may be evident in future workforce surveys, including:

- Expanding their staffing pools and introducing or expanding their on-call systems.
- Changing sick time and leave policies to better support their staff.
- Shutting down/suspend programs due to absences from specialized staff and challenges with recruitment during the pandemic.

Shelters have also been required to recruit additional staff as pandemic-related issues have arisen, for reasons such as:


- Coverage for hotel stays used to isolate sick clients or those who have been in close contact with someone who is COVID-19 positive.
- Expanded hours to accommodate changes to the times when women were more likely to reach out.
- Recent increases in women's needs have led to more staff overtime.

Women's shelters and other essential services have remained open since the pandemic began, while most Albertans were asked to stay safe in their homes. As a result, their employees have had to balance competing priorities: the health of themselves and, in many cases, their families; their professional and personal care responsibilities; and their economic well-being. Economists and health experts are concerned that the sum of individual choices made by countless women in these circumstances could result in significant setbacks to gender equality in Canada.⁹

That is largely because research on previous pandemics suggests that when a health crisis hits entire segments of society, it can set off a cycle in which declining economic status leads to rising rates of chronic illness.¹⁰ Pervasive illness depresses participation in the labour force, leading to more poverty, which leads to more disease. That, in turn, further depresses productivity and raises health care costs, again leading to more poverty and more disease.

⁹ Canadian Human Rights Commission. (2020, April 30). [Statement - Canada's social and economic recovery efforts must take a feminist approach](#) [Press release].

¹⁰ Bonds Matthew H., Keenan Donald C., Rohani Pejman and Sachs Jeffrey D. (2010). Poverty trap formed by the ecology of infectious diseases. *Proc. R. Soc. B.* 2771185–1192. <http://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2009.1778>



According to a 2010 study, whole communities can become caught in a “disease-driven poverty trap” in which “the combined causal effects of health on poverty and poverty on health implies a positive feedback system.”¹¹ This outcome not only has implications for the well-being of our shelter workforce, but the women and families who may find themselves in greater need of their supports.

Financial Strain

Revenue losses and Increased Costs

COVID-19 caused a significant reduction in fundraising due to increased competition for charitable giving as non-profits try to address the operational burdens of COVID-19, as well as restrictions that prohibit activities that generate additional revenue. Members have reported up to \$100,000 reduction in fundraised dollars, for reasons including:

- Businesses that have donated in the past are either no longer able to do so because their budgets have been significantly reduced or they are no longer in business.
- Several annual donors gave earlier in the year recognizing the impact of COVID-19.

Shelters that entered the pandemic with capital projects underway (e.g., new buildings) have been especially strained.

The requirement to isolate COVID-positive clients also creates financial challenges. Shelters with extra space have created their own isolation units, which has resulted in:

- Decreased rental income for second stage shelters.
- Reduced space of vacant units in both emergency shelters and second-stage shelter.
- Unanticipated renovation costs.

Funding

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.¹² The inadequacy of this funding model has resulted in widespread financial instability in the women’s sector that threatens the future quality and availability of the essential services they provide.¹³

¹¹ Fisher, M., & Bubola, E. (2020, March 15). [As Coronavirus Deepens Inequality, Inequality Worsens Its Spread.](#)

¹² Imagine Canada. (2005). National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations: The Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector in Alberta.

¹³ Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women. 2020. [Over half of Canadian’s women’s sector forced to reduce or cancel vital services.](#)

Figure 1: Average Funding Coverage of 2019 Second Stage Operating Budget

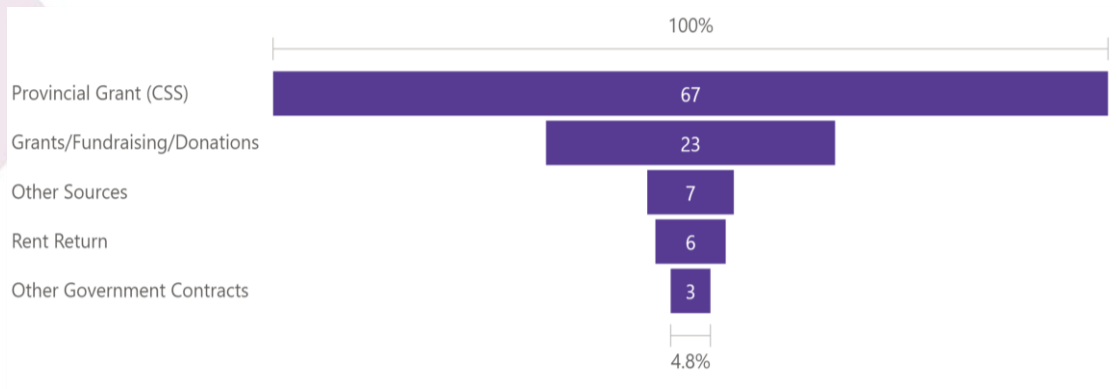
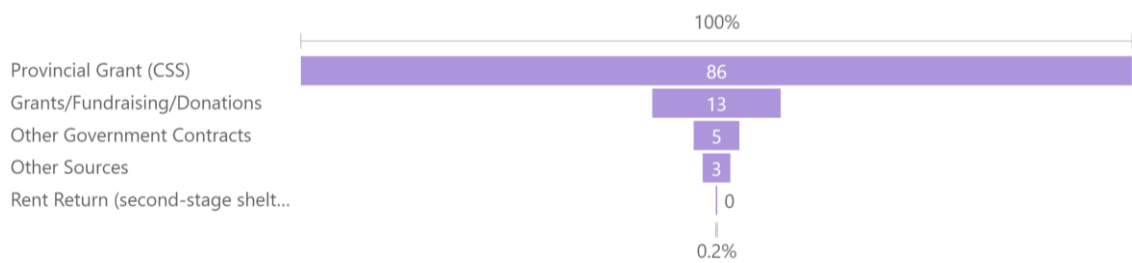


Figure 2: Average Funding Coverage of 2019 Emergency Operating Budget



Funding Sources Over Time

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

Despite a 63% decrease since 2011, second-stage shelters still fundraise significantly more of their budgets than most Canadian charities. This may present an urgent financial concern for some of these organizations as COVID-19 disrupts their access to donors through events.

Redeploying Resources

Managing an agency during a pandemic has required shelter staff, mostly leadership, to take on additional duties to address new administrative and executive requirements, including:

- Updating existing pandemic plans or developing a comprehensive pandemic plan
- Developing re-entry plans
- Staying apprised of current AHS direction and communicating to all staff

- Staffing will be a challenge when cold and flu season hits. Staff will have to remain home until they receive a negative CV-19 test result.
- Participating in numerous meeting held by agencies sharing the latest in CV19 updates for fear of missing critical information (this needs to be streamlined – prefer information comes from one source)
- Increased pressure on finance teams regarding bookkeeping and increased reporting on CV19 specific grants.
- Increased staff training about PPE and service continuity during a pandemic.
- Increased pressures on management and the executive to manage staff and client health and fear; and
- CEOs/Executive Directors must step in when their administrative staff work from home to accommodate distancing requirements or when crisis workers are not available. Directors carry a significant load during the pandemic, with unpaid overtime, exposure to illness and a significant emotional investment.

2019 Workforce Profile

Shelter workforce characteristics including age, gender, level of education, position, and employment status.

Positions

Shelter employee positions were collected and grouped into comparable job descriptions. Participating shelters reported on position type for a total of 718 employees (Table 2).

Table 2: Yearly Count and Percent of Employees by Position

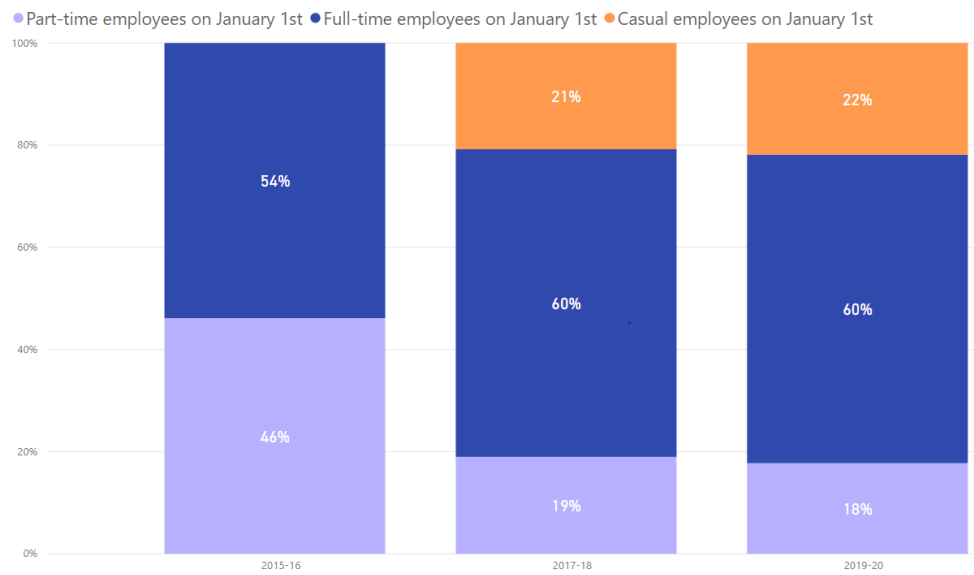
Year Position	2011-12		2015-16		2017-18		2019-20	
	N	% Total	N	% Total	N	% Total	N	% Total
<i>Crisis Counsellor</i>	252	43.4%	359	44.3%	348	39.8%	276	38.4%
<i>Executive Director</i>	28	4.8%	31	3.8%	31	3.5%	24	3.3%
<i>Admin Assistant</i>	38	6.6%	32	3.9%	54	6.2%	28	3.9%
<i>Program Manager</i>	20	3.4%	26	3.2%	42	4.8%	26	3.6%
<i>Outreach</i>	51	8.8%	61	7.5%	79	9.0%	61	8.5%
<i>Case Manager</i>	--	--	28	3.5%	52	5.9%	42	5.8%
<i>Coordinator</i>	--	--	26	3.2%	25	2.9%	21	2.9%
<i>Child Care</i>	35	6.0%	48	5.9%	31	3.5%	43	6.0%
<i>Child Support</i>	22	3.8%	34	4.2%	32	3.7%	28	3.9%
<i>Housekeeper</i>	11	1.9%	25	3.1%	38	4.3%	30	4.2%
<i>Maintenance</i>	2	0.3%	8	1.0%	8	0.9%	10	1.4%

<i>Housekeeper/Maintenance Combined</i>	11	1.9%	5	0.6%	7	0.8%	4	0.6%
<i>ICM</i>	--	--	--	--	--	--	27	3.8%
<i>Child Trauma Counsellor</i>	--	--	--	--	--	--	10	1.4%
<i>Mental Health Specialist</i>	--	--	--	--	5	0.6%	6	0.8%
<i>Outcome Tracker Specialist</i>	3	0.5%	--	--	9	1.0%	6	0.8%
<i>Public Education</i>	6	1.0%	9	1.1%	6	0.7%	7	1.0%
<i>Nurses</i>	--	0.0%	--	0.0%	2	0.2%	2	0.3%
<i>Fundraiser</i>	--	--	--	--	--	--	9	1.3%
<i>Other</i>	101	17.4%	119	14.7%	106	12.1%	58	8.1%
TOTAL	580	100.0%	811	100.0%	875	100.0%	718	100.0%

Employment Status

The proportion of shelter staff holding full-time positions has held steady at 60% since 2017-18, following a ten percent increase from 2015-16. Workers in disabilities services have seen a similar increase in full-time employees over the same period, increasing from 55.5% in 2016 to 59.9% in 2019. The percentage of female employees working part-time in Alberta's women's shelters, if you combine casual and part-time positions, is higher than the provincial and national averages for 2019, 40% compared to 26.7% in Alberta and with 25.6% across Canada.¹⁴

Figure 3: Employment Status by Year



¹⁴ Statistics Canada. [Table 14-10-0327-03 Proportion of workers in full-time and part-time jobs by sex, annual](#)

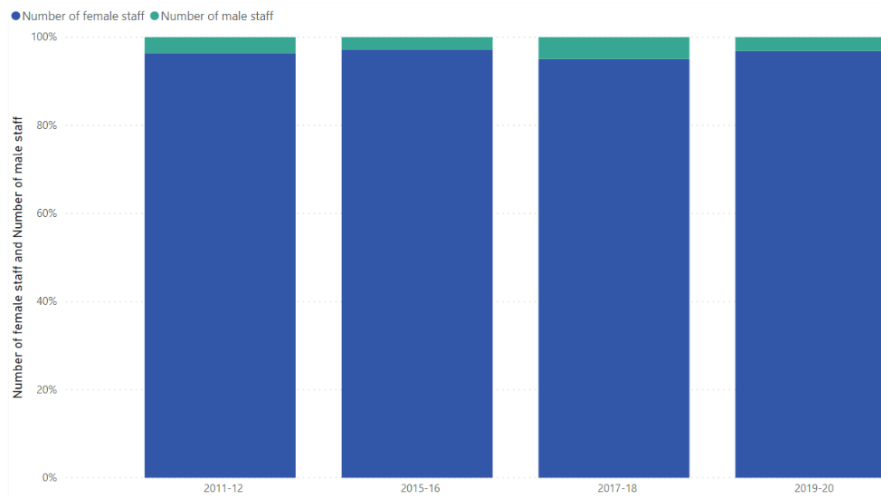
Table 3: Breakdown of the Number of Employees by Status by Type of Shelter and Municipal Size

Shelter Type 1	Full-Time Employees	Average F-T	Part-Time Employees	Average P-T	Casual Employees	Average Casual
emergency	313	16	106	6	143	7
Smaller towns or rural areas	160	11	50	4	109	8
Large municipalities (Edmonton or Calgary)	84	28	39	13	29	10
Smaller municipalities	70	23	18	6	5	2
second stage	99	12	20	3	1	0
Large municipalities (Edmonton or Calgary)	68	23	14	5	0	0
Smaller municipalities	25	12	3	1	1	1
Smaller towns or rural areas	6	2	4	1	0	0
OVERALL	412	15	126	5	144	6

Sex

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%).¹⁵

Figure 4: Yearly percentage of male and female employees for all shelters



¹⁵ Moyser, M. (2017). *Women and Paid Work*. Statistics Canada.

The wage gap between the sexes in Canada has decreased 5.5% since 1998 which, on its own, indicates a move in the right direction for the Canadian labour market.¹⁶ However, the gap's "persistence warrants attention, given that women in Canada have surpassed men in educational attainment, diversified their fields of study at post-secondary institutions, and increased their representation in higher-status occupations."¹⁷

ACWS Workforce surveys' year over year changes point that point to impressive human capital gains for our workforce in the form of educational attainment. Workers' education has surpassed that of other caring professions as well as Alberta's labour force overall.

Nonetheless, the average hourly wage for a full-time employee in an Alberta women's shelter continues to lag slightly in comparison to the average Albertan, \$27.53 compared to \$29.70.¹⁸

As women-serving organizations in the non-profit sector, many external sources of gender inequality influence shelters and their workforce. Research suggests that the overwhelming representation of women in our workforce is one strike that limits compensation for shelter workers.¹⁹ Another is the nature of shelter work and a phenomenon known as the "care penalty", which results in compensation across an entire sector being lower when its jobs parallel domestic work that, traditionally, women were expected to perform for free. The effects of these gender-based inequalities only increase as race and ability intersect with gender for female workers, regardless of the sector they work in.²⁰

Age

70.5% of shelter employees were between 25 and 54 in 2019. Workers 55 and older accounted for 20% of the workforce. This is comparable to age demographics in the Alberta Council of Disability Services (in which 9.5% of employees less than 24 years of age, 71.1% are between 25 and 54, and 18.1% are 55 years or older) and the Disability Services Industry (in which 10% of employees are between 15 and 24 years of age, 69% are between 25 and 54, and 21% are 55 years or older).

¹⁶ Pelletier, R., M. Patterson & M. Moyser. (2019). *The Gender Wage Gap in Canada: 1998 to 2018*. Statistics Canada.

¹⁷ Pelletier, R., M. Patterson & M. Moyser. (2019). *The Gender Wage Gap in Canada: 1998 to 2018*. Statistics Canada.

¹⁸ <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/676a7320-6322-43b6-9838-e46dfe38663e/resource/1bd0f52e-fc71-4c84-8527-678edc0e6da8/download/lbr-2019-awss-overview.pdf>

¹⁹ Lambert, B. & K. McInturff. (2016) *Making Women Count: The Unequal Economics of Women's Work*. Oxfam Canada.

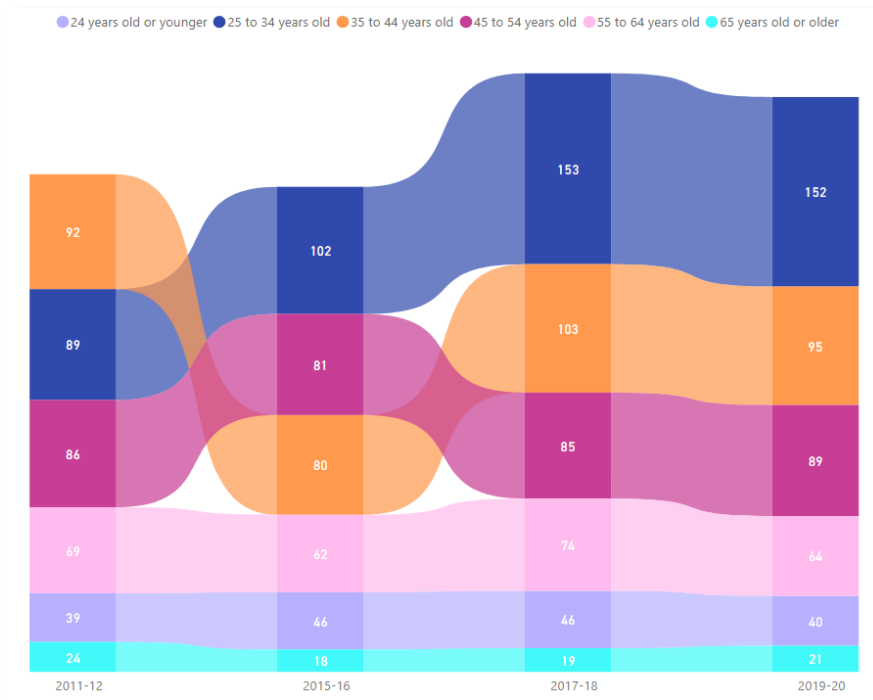
²⁰ Community Foundations Canada. (2020). *Vital Signs: Gender Equality in Canada*. Ottawa, Canada.

Table 4: Distribution of Employees by Age in 2019, Women’s Shelters vs. Disability Services

Age Co-Hort	Women Shelter Employees (N=715)	Disability Services Employees (N=4,720)
Younger than 25	7.0 %	9.5%
25 to 34	31.0%	23.6%
35 to 44	20.4%	26.5%
45 to 54	19.2%	21.0%
Older than 54	20.0%	18.1%

Full-time employees in women’s shelters were younger in 2019 compared to 2012; 63% were younger than 45 in this recent survey, compared to 55% in 2012. This trend is consistent with demographic shifts observed in the Canadian labour market in general. Millennials are now the largest and most employed co-hort in Canada and tend to be more diverse and educated than previous generations.²¹ There is growing evidence that the professional outlook of younger workers is distinct from that of previous generations, which may inform shelters’ strategies to attract and retain staff.

Figure 5: Yearly Distribution of Employees by Age for All Shelters



²¹ Statistics Canada, “Visible Minority (15), Generation Status (4), Age (12) and Sex (3) for the Population in Private Households of Canada, Provinces and Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, 2016 Census – 25% Sample Data,” 2016 Census (2019).

Number of Shelter Employees and Shelter Full-Time Equivalents

Employee data were analyzed from all shelters who participated in the survey. Overall, the 29 shelters employed 712 employees with an average of 25 employees per shelter, a decrease of 3 employees per shelter since 2018. Full time employees made up 60% of the workforce (n=412), consistent with 2018.

Turnover

All shelters, regardless of type, 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.

Notable findings include:

- The provincial staff turnover rate was calculated at 25.2%, a decrease of 5.6% from 2018.
- Turnover rates decreased in both types of shelters, but most significantly in second-stage (by 9%).
- Large municipalities saw an increase in turnover rates (at 29.8%), while small municipalities and small towns and rural areas saw declines. The most notable decline was in smaller municipalities, which saw a 14% decrease in staff turnover from 2018.

Figure 6: Average Staff Turnover by Municipality Size

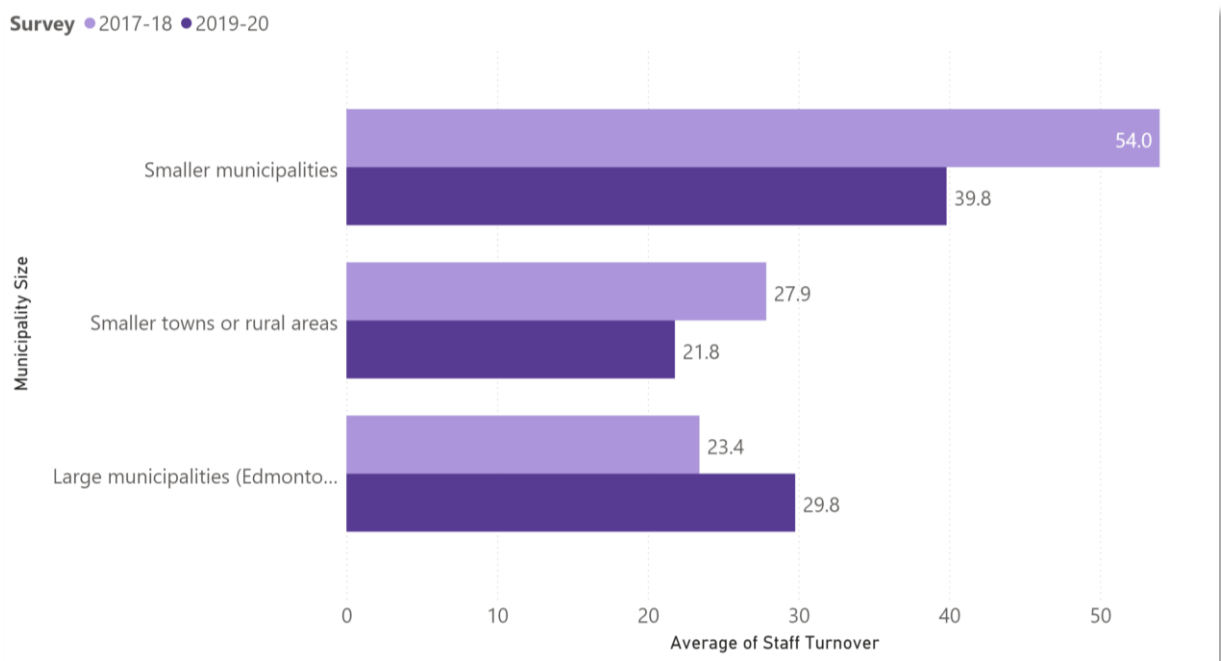
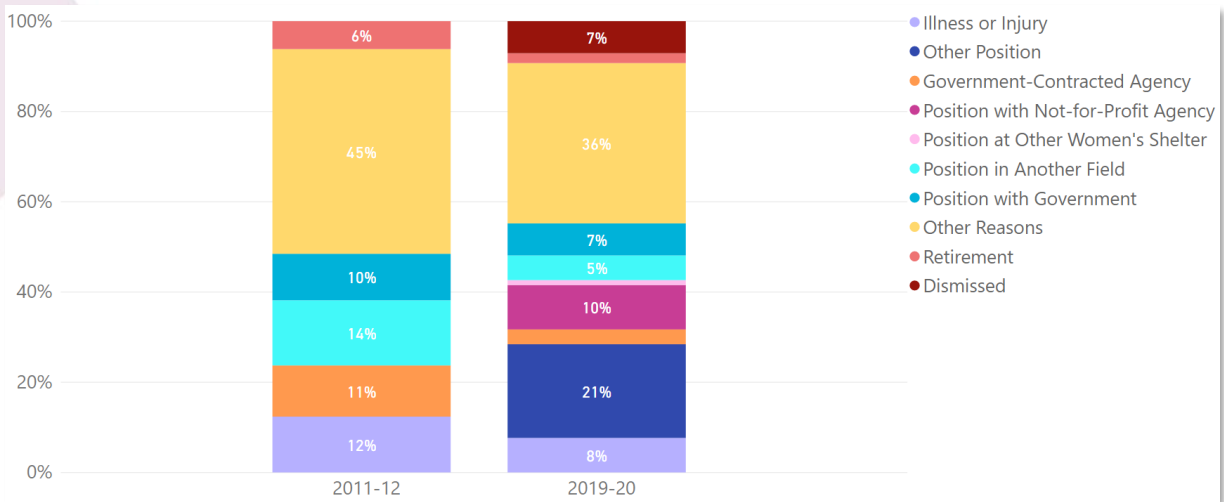


Figure 7: Reasons for Staff Turnover



Shelter Worker Wages Compared to Similar Positions in Alberta's Public and Non-Profit Sectors

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 province's non-profit and public sectors.

Figure 8: Yearly Weighted Challenges to Attracting Staff

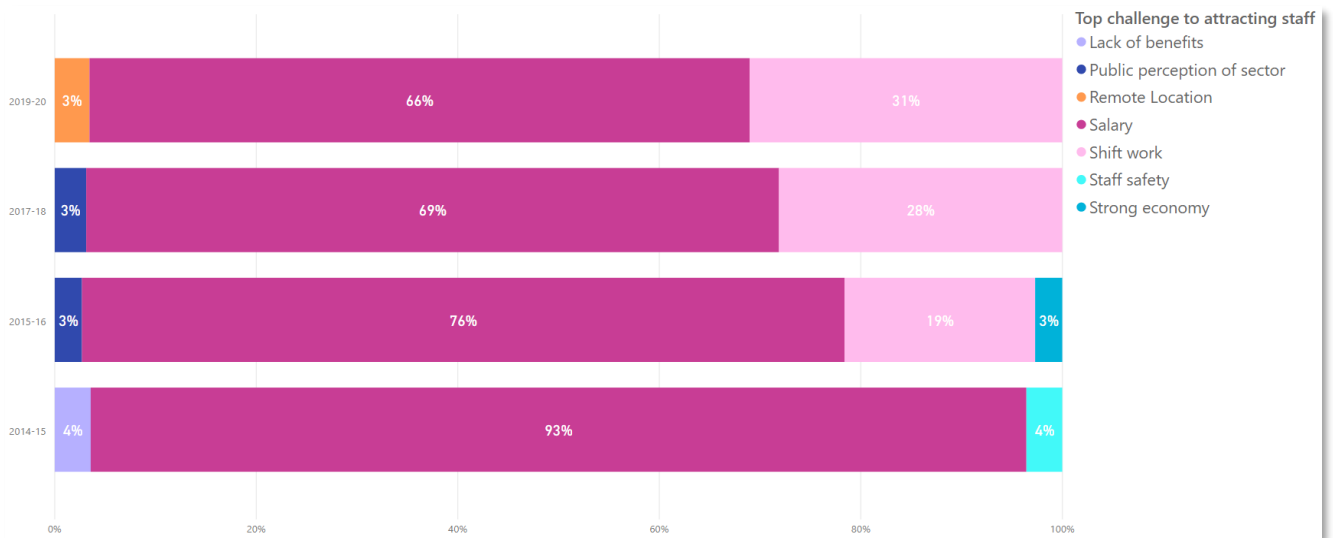
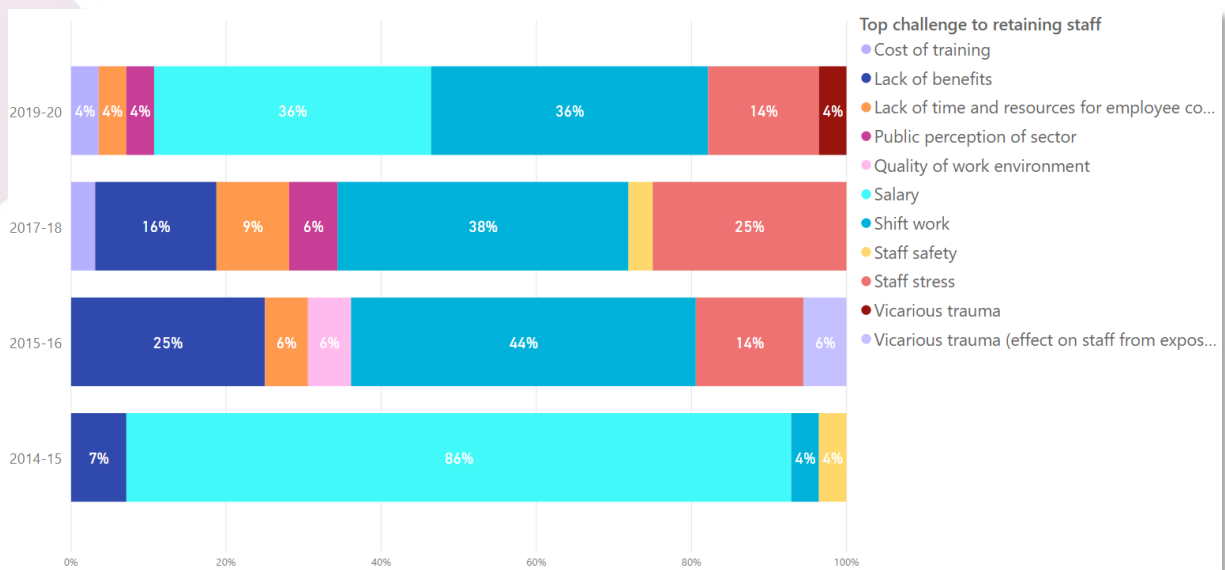


Figure 9: Yearly Weighted Challenges to Retaining Staff



Recommendations

1. Standardized Monitoring of Indicators on Women’s Economic Well-Being

The economic and health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have and will continue to have a significant impact on women. These impacts will be more pronounced for women served in Alberta’s shelters experiencing violence, poverty and chronic mental and physical health concerns.²² Women accessing shelters are also more likely to belong to diverse populations that are vulnerable to the negative health and economic impacts of the current pandemic.²³


2. Promoting Gender Equality with Policies and Benefits: “Decent Work”

As organizations that employ and serve women, Alberta’s women’s shelters have a significant stake in women’s economic equality. Many strategies to narrow the gender wage gap are looking to affect changes across female-majority sectors like the non-profit sector.²⁴ Decent work is an emerging movement promoting “opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of

²² World Health Organization. (2020). [Gender and COVID-19](#)

²³ Hoffart, I & Cairns, K. (2012). Strength in Numbers: A Ten-Year Trend Analysis of Women’s Shelters in Alberta.

²⁴ Ontario Nonprofit Network. [Decent work for women](#). (n.d.). Retrieved January 18, 2021.



opportunity and treatment for all women and men.”²⁵ The adoption of appropriate and feasible decent work policies may allow shelters to contribute to women’s participation in the labour market, thereby improving their economic well-being. Some examples that may be relevant or already well known to ACWS members include:

- Some form of employer/employee pension or retirement savings plan
- Maternity (EI) and parental leaves (ESA) are supplemented with a “top-up”
- Access to supports to ameliorate workplace stresses
- Pro-rated benefits or pay in lieu of benefits are added to wages for part-time staff
- Professional development and training opportunities are made available to staff

3. Advocacy as a Female-Majority Sector and Women-Serving Organizations

Funding for Benefits Specific to Women

Women made up 97% of employees in Alberta’s women’s shelters in 2019. 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. Some of 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.

Accessible Childcare

Affordability of childcare is consistently cited as a major barrier to women’s participation in the labour force.²⁶ It has also been a staffing concern for shelter employees throughout the pandemic so far. Improved access to affordable childcare is a measure that can be taken to retain a large portion of their employees and, more generally, promote women’s participation in the workforce.

Equitable Funding for Women-Serving Organizations

Like many women’s organizations, many of Alberta’s women’s shelters have been inadequately funded for many years. Women’s organizations are also subject to gender bias in charitable giving, which impacts their ability to offset funding shortfalls. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted fundraising activities, placing many under-funded organizations, including some shelters, in financially perilous circumstances. ACWS s may wish to develop an advocacy strategy with its members for more reliable and sustainable funding as essential service providers.

²⁵ International Labour Organization. [Decent work](#). (n.d.). Retrieved January 18, 2021.

²⁶ Patterson, M. (2018). [Who works part time and why?](#) Statistics Canada.