

ACWS POSITION ON JUST SALARIES FOR SHELTER WORKERS

July, 2023

ACWS believes that all workers in this sector deserve to receive market value for their work and not be forced to subsidize essential services by working for low wages.

ACWS believes that all workers in the domestic violence shelter sector deserve to be compensated fairly and equitably in ways that recognize the value and the challenging nature of the work they do, and the highly specialized skillset necessary to do the work. We are calling for an immediate increase to domestic violence shelter staff wages to address both inflation and the gender and racial pay gap that has impacted the sector.¹

Shelters and staff have been stretched thin by circumstances outside of their control: historic inflation rates, stagnant funding, and record-breaking turnover numbers in the midst of a surge in demand for services and an increasing complexity in domestic violence and abuse cases.² Most shelters feel the burden of limited resources and the ongoing need to fundraise, a task that has become substantially more difficult in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and skyrocketing costs of living.³ The majority of shelters and their staff have also identified inadequate wages as a significant issue that must be addressed.⁴ Inadequate wages limit the ability of shelters to recruit and retain qualified staff and to maintain an empowered and satisfied workforce, and they negatively impact both the lives and wellness of staff and their capacity to serve survivors.

Many of the people who work at domestic violence shelters do so because of a strong belief in the cause and a desire to make a difference in the lives of survivors and their children. Despite wages and benefits that are often not commensurate with their level of experience and education, do not keep up with cost-of-living increases, and do not reflect the intensity and stress of the job, they provide this essential service because of their commitment. Yet, this contributes to the continuation of a situation of injustice and disparity particularly when shelter worker salaries are compared with comparable jobs in the business and government sectors.

This disparity is particularly concerning in the context of the demographic characteristics of the domestic violence shelter sector. Recent research published by ACWS indicates that Alberta's domestic violence shelter sector workforce is highly diverse, employing more women, gender-diverse people, and IBPOC (Indigenous, Black, People of Colour) than are both present in the Canadian population, and employed by other sectors.⁵ Women, IBPOC, and gender-diverse people all experience a significant wage gap, which violates their internationally established human rights.⁶ Without a funding increase, domestic violence shelter wages will continue to remain low, and will perpetuate systemic gender and racial pay gaps. Shelter staff work hard,

¹ See Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, *Survivors Deserve Better. Shelters Deserve Better. Alberta Deserves Better. The 2021-22 ACWS Domestic Violence Shelter Workforce Survey* (2023), 17-18, and Imagine Canada, *Diversity is our strength: Improving working conditions in Canadian Nonprofits* (2022).

² Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, *Survivors Deserve Better. Shelters Deserve Better. Alberta Deserves Better. The 2021-22 ACWS Domestic Violence Shelter Workforce Survey* (2023), 5-6.

³ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

⁶ See the *Beijing Platform for Action* 165 (a) and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* 11 (d)..

and their work makes Alberta a safer place for everyone. They deserve wages that are fair and equitable.

ACWS believes that all workers in this sector deserve to be treated justly by receiving market value for the work they do. We have administered eight surveys on shelter operations, funding, staff compensation, and working conditions across Alberta’s domestic violence shelters since 2002. We published our eighth survey, *Survivors Deserve Better. Shelters Deserve Better. Alberta Deserves Better. The 2021-22 ACWS Domestic Violence Shelter Workforce Survey* in February 2023. This report called on the Government of Alberta to enact an immediate increase to domestic violence shelter funding to accommodate inflation since the last funding increase in 2015, and to work with ACWS to modernize shelter standards, update the shelter staffing model, and review operational funding.

Some of the additional findings from this most recent report include:

- Alberta domestic violence shelters have not received a funding increase in 8 years.
- Since that time, the cost of living has risen over 20%.
- The average wage of domestic violence shelter staff is 15% lower than the wage of the average Albertan, 21% lower than comparable business sector wages, and 33% lower than comparable government wages.
- In 2021-22, the domestic violence staff turnover rate reached 45%. This is an unprecedented rate in the Alberta domestic violence shelter sector, and it is 18% higher than the national staff turnover average for domestic violence shelters.
- More than one third of domestic violence shelter staff report that they work an additional job.
- 92% of those who work an additional job report that they do so to supplement their income.
- 94% of staff who are thinking about leaving their job report that it is because of insufficient pay.
- Two thirds of shelters report that stagnant wages negatively impact the quality of care they are able to provide to survivors.

In May 2023, both the Alberta New Democratic Party and the United Conservative Party included funding increases for domestic violence shelters in their party platforms. Neither party has committed to the full inflationary increase ACWS and our members have asked for.

May 2023

Highlights of ACWS Research and Advocacy on Shelter Salaries

| Date | Report | Outcome |
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| 2002 | Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters Compensation Review and Evaluation | This Survey was presented to Minister Iris Evans and resulted in a 20% average increase for all positions that were part of the contracted domestic violence shelter staffing model. |
| 2012 | Comparative Compensation Analysis | The province responded by incorporating a 5% increase to |

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| | | shelter salaries in addition to a \$1,500 lump sum payment. |
| 2014 | ACWS Workforce Survey 2012-2013 | Shelters received a 5% increase in 2014. |
| 2015 | ACWS Workforce Survey 2013-2014 | Shelters received a 5% increase in 2014/15 while other agencies were being asked to hold the line and government salaries were frozen. |
| 2017 | ACWS Workforce Survey 2015-2016 | While sheltering agencies received a significant \$15 million (44%) increase in provincial funding in September 2015, none of these dollars were allocated for wage increases. Shelters were able to increase outreach services to women, children and seniors by 45% and at the same time saw a reduction in turn-aways due to capacity issues by 18% (Annual Provincial Shelter Data, 2017) immediately following this injection of funds. |
| 2018 | ACWS Workforce Survey 2017-2018 | UCP commits to no rollbacks for women's shelters. Workforce needs identified in Red Tape Reduction Task Force whose work has been delayed due to the pandemic. |
| 2021 | ACWS Workforce Survey 2019-2020 | |
| 2023 | Survivors Deserve Better. Shelters Deserve Better. Alberta Deserves Better. The 2021-2022 ACWS Domestic Violence Shelter Workforce Survey | Both the Alberta New Democratic Party and the United Conservative Party include funding increases for domestic violence shelters in their party platforms. |