

Persons with Developmental Disabilities Program

Detailed Summary of the 2008 PDD Program Stakeholder Discussions

“What We Heard”

February, 2009



Alberta

Introduction

The Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) Program provides support to over 9,100 adults with developmental disabilities to enable them to have the same opportunities as other Albertans to live, work and participate in their communities. The Program provides funding for staff to support individuals in a full array of home living options, facilitate access to community activities, and assist with participation in employment and training. The PDD Program is administered by six Community Boards, appointed by, and accountable to, the Minister of Alberta Seniors and Community Supports.

In June 2008, the Honourable Mary Anne Jablonski, Minister of Alberta Seniors and Community Supports, asked the PDD Community Boards to consult key stakeholders about issues and opportunities related to the ongoing challenges faced by community service agencies in recruiting and retaining staff to support people with developmental disabilities.

Stakeholders were asked to identify innovative practice or strategies that could be undertaken to ensure quality services can continue to be provided within the context of current and future labor markets. This report is a summary of the issues and ideas presented by participants in the regional sessions held last June.

The Minister appreciates the contributions made by all individuals involved in these sessions. There will be ongoing opportunities for discussion as the PDD Program works to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of services to people with developmental disabilities, and ensure the long term sustainability of the Program.

Part I: What We Heard

The Stakeholder Engagement Process

PDD Community Boards held 16 stakeholder engagement sessions across their regions. Over 200 individuals and organizations participated, representing four key stakeholder groups:

- adults with developmental disabilities;
- family members and guardians;
- service agencies (board members and staff); and
- provincial/community organizations (advocacy and other community organizations).

The six PDD Community Boards planned and facilitated the sessions. Each session posed the following questions:

1. What are some new and innovative practices or strategies that PDD and its partners could adopt that would enable it to continue to provide quality services with the same number or fewer staff?
2. For each innovative idea:
 - Are there barriers to successful implementation of the strategy and, if so, what steps could be taken to remove the barrier?
 - Which strategies could be accomplished in the short-term (within six months) and which would require a longer term for implementation (one or two years)?
 - What partnerships would be required to implement the strategy?

Innovative Practice Suggestions

Participants' suggestions for innovative practices can be grouped into six categories.

A. Strengthen Community Capacity Through Partnerships

Under the *Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Act*, the PDD Community Boards are responsible to, among other things:

1. provide services;
2. determine community priorities in the provision of services, and allocate funding accordingly;
3. assess on an ongoing basis the needs of the region for services for adults with developmental disabilities; and
4. coordinate, with other Community Boards and public and private bodies, the provision of services to adults with developmental disabilities.

Participants in the engagement sessions reinforced the need to partner with municipalities, business organizations, and volunteer sector organizations to avoid duplication (e.g., employment, education and housing). They also noted the need to increase community awareness and enhance the individual's connections to existing community supports. Participants also suggested encouraging partnerships with other government programs and ministries to coordinate supports, noting as an example the coordination needed to effectively support people who have complex needs.

Specific examples provided included:

- Support efforts to expand community awareness about the contributions adults with developmental disabilities make and the steps communities can take to be more inclusive.
- Expand partnerships that support the development of inclusive educational and employment opportunities. These partnerships with Alberta's post-secondary institutions and the business community are producing positive outcomes.
- Support the development of an inclusive, affordable apartment building with individual suites as well as office space for service providers and other organizations. The units would be open to all members of the community, including individuals supported by the PDD Program, and some would be designated for agency support staff. Opportunities to share staffing resources between service agencies and with other government partners could be explored.
- Partner with other programs or Ministries to streamline supports and avoid duplication. The PDD Program could explore sharing existing positions or creating new positions in conjunction with the Ministries of Alberta Health and Wellness (Mental Health), Education or Children and Youth Services.
- Partnerships with Mental Health are essential to appropriately support people who have complex support needs, including better assessments.
- Build on best practice to connect individuals to generic community supports and services that are emerging from some current pilot projects.

B. Flexible Funding and Supports for Families and Community Service Agencies

Most PDD-funded services are provided by community service agencies that are contracted by the PDD Community Boards to provide supports to adults with developmental disabilities. However, a growing number of families choose the PDD Program's Family Managed Supports option, which enables families to hire and manage the staffing supports themselves. Because the needs of individuals and their families are often unique, and the location, structure, size and services offered by community agencies differ as well, participants involved in both funding options proposed ways to increase the flexibility of funding, while maintaining or improving core accountability requirements. It was suggested that flexibility may help enable innovation and efficiencies in service delivery.

Specific examples included:

- Encourage more families to use the PDD Program's Family Managed Supports funding option. This option enables families to directly hire and manage the staff themselves. Under a Family Managed Service agreement, the staff are often hired from outside of the service agency sector, thereby taking some of the pressure off the sector's workforce.
- Allow those receiving funding under a Family Managed Service Agreement to hire family members. Currently, hiring family members requires special approval from the PDD Community Board. Expanding the policy may be particularly attractive in circumstances where a family member has a unique skill or relationship with the individual, and where the natural relationships between family members would not be strained or damaged.

- Work with families and stakeholders to establish resource centres for families that promote the sharing of ideas and resources and the development of family and individual leadership. Family resource centres could also offer training to family members who hire and manage their own staff (i.e., family managed supports).
- Create new ways of providing funding to service agencies that supports creativity and efficiency in service delivery. Currently, agencies use all funding provided for an individual, regardless of need. In some cases, this could lead to “over-servicing” and reduced independence for the individual. An alternative could be to provide block funding for services provided to groups of individuals, which would allow agencies to be more creative in their staffing models. Block funding of this kind could be coupled with a shift to a strong “outcome-based” accountability mechanism (see below).

C. Workforce Development – Education, Recruitment and Retention

Participants noted that Alberta’s strong economy has made it challenging for the community disability service sector to recruit and retain the staff they need. A number of participants observed that attracting and retaining staff requires more than money, but also identified a number of possible innovations, from more formalized credentials and professional associations to more flexible working conditions, and enhanced training and educational opportunities. Finally, encouraging new people to enter the field, including creatively targeting specific demographic groups, surfaced in the discussion. Some of these initiatives would be the responsibility of the employers, while others may require the involvement of the PDD Program or other government partners.

Specific examples included:

- Develop community-based “centres of excellence” that allow agencies to develop and share resources, staff and expertise in key service areas including, for example, complex behaviours, residential care and day programming.
- Explore opportunities for PDD-funded agencies to share staff with agencies funded by Alberta Children and Youth Services, mental health, or with continuing care centres or nursing homes.
- Have the community disability services sector look into recruitment and retention strategies such as:
 - Development of an apprenticeship program for the sector;
 - Development of a professional association that enhances the visibility and increases the credibility of the sector;
 - Ensure consistent skill sets and career laddering across regions for staff;
 - Develop and implement specific strategies to attract new demographic groups to the sector such as students, mature workers, individuals seeking to re-enter the workforce or newly landed immigrants;
 - Develop career training opportunities for high school students (e.g. credits for volunteering), or offer financial incentives for students entering post-secondary education programs related to disability services. Expand “practicum” placement opportunities for students in related post-secondary programs to expand the practical experience of new graduates.

D. Use of Technology

Participants suggested increasing the use of technology to reduce the reliance on paid staff and increase independent living (e.g., on-call systems and support teams, automated medication reminders, 24 hour phone-line). It was also suggested that technology could be used to offer virtual training opportunities for staff, or to provide families, especially those in remote regions, both information and the means to connect with other families. Participants also cited the need for service providers to share resources as well as collaborate on shared goals (e.g., shared service staff, administrative services, and/or joint recruitment/training functions).

Specific examples included:

- Utilize technology to reduce staffing needs in residential settings and increase individual independence. For example, use of an on-call system or emergency alert system for staff to enable staff to be present as needed rather than on-site full-time. Other technological innovations could include automated medication reminders and visual cues/prompts for individuals that facilitate their independent living.
- Create web-based or video training/education packages to support agency staff working with individuals who have complex needs. Because individuals with complex needs often require substantial staff support, increasing the skills of certain staff could provide better support to individuals and ensure the most effective allocation of staff resources.
- Create a virtual resource centre for service agencies and/or families that reaches a wider, cross-province, audience, or establish a 24 hour phone-line to assist individuals or families.
- Encourage individuals and agencies to utilize community living options that require fewer staff than the group home model. Examples include supported independent living, support homes, cooperative housing arrangements and roommates. These models, coupled with technological innovations or mobile, “on-call” support teams, could increase individuals’ independence.

E. Clear Roles and Mandate of the PDD Program

The PDD Program’s legislative mandate highlights the importance of honouring the dignity and equal worth of adults with developmental disabilities, supporting their self-determination and inclusion in community life, and helping communities develop their capacity for inclusion. The PDD Program’s policy reflects these broad principles and helps translate them into practice. There was substantial agreement among the participants that successfully responding to the identified challenges requires a clear understanding of the PDD Program’s mandate, along with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for stakeholders and partners.

Specific examples included:

- Clearly define what services the PDD Program funds. Clear definitions are required to ensure that PDD-funded services are high quality, consistent across the Province, and available to individuals and their families on an equitable basis. This should be done in consultation with government partners who may also provide funding or supports in related areas.
- Ensure PDD-funded services focus on genuine opportunities for community inclusion rather than, for example, household tasks or companionship activities. Refocusing PDD funding on

activities that support personal development and promote genuine inclusion may encourage greater independence and the creation of supportive personal/community networks.

- Encourage the use of unpaid or natural supports, including family members, neighbours, volunteers, colleagues at work. Expanding the ways in which adults with developmental disabilities are connected to the community beyond “paid services” supports the Program’s goals of independence and inclusion.
- Consider the mandates and eligibility criteria of other government programs, and work with government partners such as Alberta Health and Wellness, Alberta Employment and Immigration and Alberta Children and Youth Services to collaboratively meet the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities.
- Link the provision of funded services more directly and consistently to assessed individual need. Consistent, individualized needs assessment process could help ensure that funded services are approved equitably across the Province and that supports are available when and where needed most.
- Consider creating a single program that would provide funding for both children and adults with developmental disabilities. Currently individuals transition between two separate programs when they turn 18 years old. An alternate model would involve the PDD Program working closely with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to continue to streamline the transition process for both individuals with disabilities and their families.
- Support strong, ongoing connections between the PDD Community Boards and community stakeholders. Encourage ongoing communication and education about roles and responsibilities and opportunities for collaboration.

F. Accountability

Participants noted the need to have better and more effective tools for measuring outcomes for individuals. For some stakeholders, measuring individual outcomes took precedence over service outputs. Participants also highlighted the need for accountability systems that reward service providers who find efficient and cost effective ways to deliver services while focusing on quality outcomes for individuals.

Specific examples included:

- Ensure that agencies are funded based upon clearly defined performance outputs and outcomes.
- Create a website that reports on the effectiveness of service provider results against key performance measures.
- Pilot outcome-based funding and contracts with selected service providers.
- Reward service providers for innovative and efficient practice based on clearly defined criteria that outlines what will be rewarded.

G. General Comments from the Sessions

Participants provided general comments about the stakeholder engagement process, with different stakeholder groups emphasizing different challenges and opportunities.

- Service agencies focused on the business relationship with the PDD Community Boards (funding levels, contracting and accountability requirements), as well as innovative service and staffing models.
- Families emphasized the need for flexible staffing and additional support in managing services for their adult family member.
- Self advocates emphasized the partnerships needed to maximize the use of generic community supports, staff recruitment and retention challenges, and innovative ways to deliver services. They also emphasized that good communication is required to understand their needs.

In addition, a number of general comments were made by participants:

- Participants welcomed the engagement sessions as an opportunity for open dialogue and collaboration on shared challenges.
- Many participants requested “follow up” from the sessions, including opportunities for information and input about next steps or actions taken as a result of the sessions.
- Several participants discussed the need for a review process to determine the core services the PDD Program should provide.
- Innovation and change were generally recognized as necessary, although for some the prospect of change also caused anxiety. Many noted that important innovations are already occurring in the PDD Program, as well as among service agencies, self-advocates and families. Future innovations may be able to build on this work.
- Some participants expressed concerns about staff wages, particularly in community service agencies. It was generally acknowledged, however, that the challenges cannot be solved by dollars alone, and that there is still a need for innovation within the PDD Program.
- Several participants commented on the stress many agency staff currently face, and highlighted their commitment and dedication.
- There was some discussion about whether providing more funded services always supports the PDD Program’s goals of self-determination and community inclusion for adults with developmental disabilities. While some expressed anxiety about reducing paid staffing supports, others noted that helping individuals to “graduate” from funded services can lead to improved outcomes and more independence.
- A number of participants emphasized the importance of providing documents written in plain, easy-to-understand language.