



**Government Advocacy Tool Kit
for
A Better Manitoba**





Abilities Manitoba is a not for profit coalition of member agencies that fosters excellence in services for people with intellectual disabilities. Abilities Manitoba advocates on behalf of our members to government and the community at large.

Did you know?

- There is currently no mechanism to measure the quality of the services (outcomes) for persons with an intellectual disability.
- The minimal requirement for direct support professionals is a grade 10 education and first aid/CPR training. All other training standards are set by individual agencies.
- Day and employment services are not allotted funding for staff training.
- Residential services are funded approximately \$290/person receiving supports each year for training and professional development.
- All other similar caring professions have required standardized training.
- Day and employment services are only funded by government to pay \$12.06/hour.
- Residential services are only funded by government to pay direct support professional wages of \$12.06 or \$13.75/hour.
- Low wages make it difficult to keep support staff in the sector.
- High turnover makes it difficult to have continuity in people's lives and adds costs.
- Staffing represents at least 75% of an agency's annual budget.
- A person with intellectual disability could have up to 770 caregivers between the ages of 18 and 65 due to high turnover.
- In a survey conducted with agencies in February 2017, 90% reported negative impacts on services as a result of staff turnover.

WHY WE NEED YOUR HELP

In 2014, Abilities Manitoba invited all individuals supported through Community Living disAbility Services, their support networks, agencies and government to attend province-wide events to gather feedback about services. Additionally we held 14 focus groups and an online survey. Together more than 1000 people contributed to determining Abilities Manitoba priorities.

Through that process our community identified a number of goals and we are currently focusing on three:

1. Direct service professionals need improved training and to be fairly compensated to ensure that we have a strong workforce to support your family members. In order to measure the quality of services provided to people with intellectual disabilities our community needs a person-centric process for evaluating and reporting on agency services. Together this will make for **Better Support & Outcomes**.
2. You and your family should be able to access what you need, when you need it through **Better Access to Services**. Our community needs processes and programs that are accessible and user-friendly. Families should not have to wait years to access services.
3. Everyone in our province deserves to have meaningful relationships and community connections through support for the *Accessibility for Manitobans Act*, connecting individuals with employment and ensuring person-centred supports and a dignified income. People with intellectual disability have a right to live meaningful, inclusive lives of their choosing. Together this will make for **Better Inclusion**.

The greatest changes are a result of the advocacy of family members.

Your voice is the most important.

There are four key partners needed in this advocacy effort:

Individuals receiving supports, families, agencies and Abilities Manitoba. We will all be working together to advocate for change. You are NOT alone!

Of these groups, family members and self-advocates have the strongest voice.

- You make up the community that they represent
- You have nothing other than improved quality of life to gain
- Most important: you have the personal, compelling stories to back up your requests

Will this work? **Yes!**

Will it be a lot of hard work over a long period of time?
Very possibly!

Will it be worth it? **Yes!**



77
Agencies Across Manitoba



43
Agencies in Winnipeg



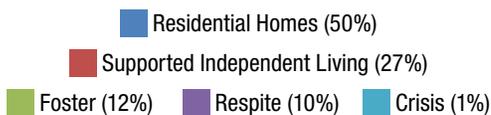
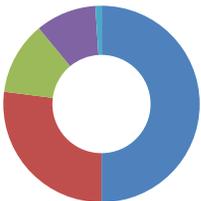
6,813
People Supported



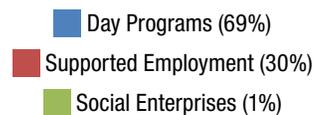
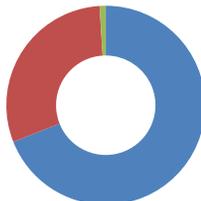
9,806
Full & Part Time Employees



3,453
People Supported in Residential Programs



3,360
People Supported in Day Programs



Issue

Adults with an intellectual disability are being supported by front line workers who are underpaid and under-trained.

Risk

Poor training and poor wages in a high responsibility position affects the quality of the services delivered and results in high turnover. Vulnerable adults can have up to 770 different care providers in their lifetime. Front line workers are required to work independently, solve complex quality of life issues and provide intimate personal care. Staff are paid poorly and their training varies based on the agency. Turnover means inconsistent care impacting quality of life, high administrative costs for recruiting and training and additional health and emotional risks.

Ethical Considerations

Community Living disAbility Services is the only human service sector that doesn't require staff to have more robust training, does not pay at a level that encourages staff to make a career of their job and does not have a mechanism to measure quality outcomes. These all represent barriers to full participation for adults with intellectual disabilities.

What we are asking the government to do

1. Support Abilities Manitoba recommendation to develop and implement a training program similar in scope to other professionals like health care aides and educational assistants.
2. Raise direct support staff wages to a level that respects the complexity and responsibility of the role.
3. Link pay increases to education & training.



ISSUE

A mechanism to support and measure quality of services for each agency funded by the Province of Manitoba

Issue

Manitoba's Community Living disAbility Services system does not have a way to measure and report on agency services. While some agencies have implemented their own systems, a consistent approach is needed where agencies are measured using the same values and standards.

Background

Agencies are asking to work with the government to develop a proactive way to evaluate services. This would outline strengths and highlight areas for growth. It would also be a tool for families to evaluate prospective service providers.

Risk

There is currently no effective way to measure the quality of services in the areas we know are important to people supported by Community Living disAbility Services. This includes: personal goals and outcomes, level of satisfaction, recreation and leisure, meaningful friendships and relationships, staff turnover, budget management etc. The framework needs to be person-centered with measurable goals.

Ethical Considerations

Criteria for measuring success needs to be set—this will help agencies meet goals, ensure they're offering services that meet people's needs and give families an understanding of the quality of the programs they are selecting. Agencies are asking for this and want to see standards in place.

What we are asking the government to do

1. Work with Abilities Manitoba to develop a way of measuring the outcomes of agencies.



YOUR TOOLKIT

We know that everyone has a different capacity to help. Time, energy, knowledge and ability will vary amongst families, but help is needed and greatly appreciated! We all have ways we can contribute.

Here are 7 possible ways to help. Not every tool is for you, please choose the ones that you are comfortable using.

- **First:** Sign up for e-newsletters to support advocacy at www.abilitiesmanitoba.org. We'll share tips, tricks, events and stories to inspire your advocacy
- **Meet** your Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) and the MLA in other areas: where you work, where other family members live. Bring your family member who is receiving support to meet his/her MLA and yours
- **Call, email or write** the Minister of Families and cc: your MLA
- Use **social media** to ask questions if you're comfortable on that platform
- **Attend** events in your area that your elected official is hosting or attending. Talk to him/her and talk to other people there about the issues that are important to you
- Involve your **friends** and **family**
- If you are comfortable **speaking with the media**, please contact us! We are looking for family members to speak to these important issues. Your voice is so powerful!
- **Act now!**

The following pages offer tips, suggestions and ideas.

- 1 Meet your MLA and the MLA for other areas such as where you work, where other family members live. Bring your family member who is receiving support to meet his/her MLA and yours. Invite them to your home.**

What to do:

Prepare for the meeting

- Read through background information
- Call or email your MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) and ask for a meeting to discuss disability funding. (Contact information for all MLA's at www.abilitiesmanitoba.org)
- Think of a few examples of how this is personal for you and your family (ie: family member has had too many support professionals and it's difficult, the needs of your family member is complex and standard training is important...it will be different for every family—but relate it back to Abilities current goal)

The more our elected officials meet and know people affected by these issues, the more likely they are to take them seriously and advocate on your behalf.

Attend the meeting

- Be friendly and respectful, this is a chance to make a contact who will also become an advocate
- Ask if your MLA has any personal experience with disability
- Ask your MLA what's in the works for funding/services through Community Living disability Services
- Tell him/her that disability funding and services is very important to your family. Then explain why: use the personal story you thought about. It's really important to make the visit personal. Share your family's story and how these issues impact you



- Ask for a personal commitment to the issue
- Don't be afraid to say you don't know. If he/she asks a question that you don't know the answer to, don't be afraid to say you don't know. Tell him/her that you'll get back with the answer. Abilities Manitoba will help you answer any questions that might come up
- Avoid arguments.
- If he/she is supportive, ask for help garnering support from other MLA's
- Ask for a photo (selfie) on your smartphone to tweet/share via Facebook/Instagram later

Follow up

- Follow up with an email or a letter to thank your MLA for the meeting & reiterate how important disability services are to you and what you discussed
- Let him/her know that you'll be in touch
- Share the photo on social media thanking him/her for their engagement and support of disability issues. Use the #disabilitiesmatter #mbpoli hashtags



2 Call, email or write to the Minister of Families.

What to do:

Tell the Minister your story, ask for support, ask for a meeting.

In the email/letter or on the phone:

- Introduce yourself
- Tell the person why you are calling or writing—you care deeply about issues related to people with intellectual disabilities
- Explain how this is personal for you—why does this affect YOU? Tell your story
- Ask your questions: Will you support the Abilities Manitoba initiatives to develop mandatory training for the staff that support my family member and the initiative to develop a quality assurance framework to ensure that services are person centered?
- Discuss your concerns honestly and respectfully
- Ask for support
- Ask for a response (if written)
- Ask for a meeting, if you're comfortable meeting with the Minister
- CC your MLA

The squeaky wheel gets the grease.

After you send the communication/speak on the phone:

- Keep a record of your communication and of any response you receive
- Share on social media that you have contacted the person and tag them in the message that you're looking forward to a response. Use the #mbpoli hashtag



3 Use social media to ask questions.

What to do:

Social media can be a wonderful tool for connecting with people in a public forum. It's a way to garner interest from the general public about our goals as well as a way to engage our elected officials in conversation, or remind them that the people who vote are watching and care about their actions.

Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters.

Beginner level:

- Start some social media accounts. Abilities Manitoba uses Facebook and Twitter
- Follow Abilities Manitoba and all of the elected officials, local news outlets, political parties, disability agencies, friends, family and general interest pages that you like
- Spend time “listening”—this means reading what others post, getting a lay of the land
- Like, retweet, share content that you support—retweeting Abilities Manitoba posts is very helpful!

Intermediate level:

- Share things you see online that are of interest on your social media: news stories, photos, articles

Advanced:

- Engage in conversation—comment on posts in a respectful and thoughtful way
- Post your opinion when decisions are made in government that relate to the goals we are working toward
- Invite others to join you on social media
- Engage politicians and ask questions publicly

4 Attend events in your area that your elected official is hosting or attending. Talk to him/her and talk to other people there about the issues that are important to you.

Attending events hosted by your local politician or events where your representative is advertising their attendance are great “casual” opportunities to remind him/her that you are there and that you are expecting him/her to support you. These can be town hall meetings, visits to community centers, honorary grocery bagger at the grocery store...these folks are out in the community a lot.

You help me.
I'll help you.
That's politics.

—Terry McAuliffe

What to do:

- Showing up means a lot
- Be friendly & respectful
- Introduce your MLA to other constituents/family members
- Make yourself the expert on disabilities and offer to be available for questions, should he/she want to hear a constituent perspective
- Take the opportunity to ask for updates if the environment is right



5 Involve your friends and family.

The recipe for social change is not one dimensional, it has multiple ingredients: a burning platform, a compelling narrative, agitators and protesters, brought powerfully together through social media, surprising friends and solutions which, if not tested and proven, at least on the best available evidence and research, seem to have a chance of working. —Julia Unwin

What to do:

- Talk to your friends and family about why this is important to you. Tell your story
- Share this tool kit with them and ask them to become an advocate
- Support and thank them!



6 Act now!

Voting is easy and marginally useful, but it is a poor substitute for democracy, which requires direct action by concerned citizens. —Howard Zinn

What to do:

- Talk to people
- Be inspired to take action when the moment is right, this could be: calling into a radio talk show, writing a letter to the editor, rallying your contacts to take action, organizing a protest.....anything that will help the cause in a respectful way
- Attend events, participate in Abilities led campaigns
- Do it all again....don't stop calling, meeting, emailing, interacting on social media—try to be active a few times a month or more!



SAMPLE LETTER

MLA Name
Address
City, MB Postal Code

Date

Dear <<NAME>>,

I'm writing today because I live in your constituency and I'm concerned about <<fill in your concern>>.

This is personal for me because <<Add your personal story and why this is so important to you—**this is the most important and powerful part of the letter**>>.

I hope that you will <<fill in what you are asking for. Ex: I hope that you will let the Minister of Families know that you support a training program for direct support professionals. >>

I would like you to tell me what the government is doing to address these concerns. You can reach me <<fill in how he/she can reach you>>.

Please let me know if there is anyone else to whom I should speak.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Thanks,

<<Signature>>

<<Name>>

Thank you.
YOU are the
change!





Questions or suggestions? Contact:

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