

Getting Disability Work on the Election Agenda

Posted By Kathleen Biersdorff on March 12, 2019

As talk of the 2019 provincial election ramps up, we hear more and more about party plans for health care, education, the environment, business and jobs. To hear politicians talk sometimes, you would think that energy sector jobs are the only thing that contributes to our economy. This ignores the fact that the [over 26,000 non-profits with 417,000 employees](#) contribute [\\$9.6 billion to Alberta's GDP](#). (That does not include the estimated [262 million annual volunteer hours](#) for board and committee work, fundraising and program support.) It also fails to recognize that human services that support people who are aging and/or have disabilities is generally considered to be [the #1 growth industry](#) in North America. The need for people who do what we do is growing, so it makes sense that the needs of our sector and those we support each day *should* be an active part of the election conversation.

Getting on the Radar

Over the past few months, ADWA has worked with other organizations on an Alberta Disability Forum government relations group to develop materials and strategies to get disability on the 2019 election agenda. The group has developed several sets of [handouts and advocacy support materials](#) on accessibility and poverty.

ADWA has developed its own [handout](#) specific to disability workers' issues (compensation, burnout and professional development), which is available on our website. It consists of facts that help inform parties and their candidates about our issues and the following four questions:

- If elected, what will you do to raise the wages of skilled disability workers?
- If elected, what will you do to make sure that disability workers are no longer burdened with the hidden costs of providing services (e.g., transportation, entry fees, meal costs)?
- If elected, what will you do to fix the underlying causes of high burnout and turnover among disability workers?
- If elected, what will you do to make sure that disability workers are able to afford and access the education and training they need throughout their career to provide effective support to individuals with disabilities?

ADWA has sent these questions, with the background information, to the leaders of each of Alberta's parties. We have set up a new [Election 2019](#) webpage under *News & Events*. As the parties respond, we will add their answers to that page so that you can be the judge of which party is most in line with your views. This webpage also has links to the party platforms, helpful advice on engaging with candidates at community forums, private meetings at their office or when they show up at your front door.

To get any issue on someone's radar, they must hear about it 7 – 10 times from a variety of sources. The same is true for political parties, their leaders and candidates. The more people they hear about an issue from, the more important they recognize it to be. We need you, as a disability professional, to help get disability and disability worker issues on the radar with politicians and voters.

What You Can Do

Many individuals with disabilities who could and would vote, don't vote because they don't know how to pick a candidate to vote for and/or need help casting a ballot. As a disability worker, it is well within the scope of your job to help them learn about candidates' views on issues important to them and help them engage with candidates whose views on those issues are unknown. At the same time

that you are helping them find out what the parties stand for (i.e., party platform and policies) from their websites, you will probably see where they stand on the issues important to you and your fellow disability workers. You can attend meetings with candidates together to find out more and help them ask the candidates questions about their issues. Help them introduce themselves before, during or after the meeting and support them to tell their story about how the issue affects them and ask how the candidate will address that issue if elected.

You can also attend community political meetings on your own time and talk to the candidates. Introduce yourself, explain what you do for a living and tell your personal story about the impact on your life of low wages, the extra costs of your work, the need to work multiple jobs to make ends meet, time away from family, burnout, lack of training opportunities or whatever you wish them to address if elected. Share your solutions. Use the [ADWA handout](#) to back up your experience with facts. Feel free to give the candidate a copy to take home and think about. Help the individual you support share their story and issues in the same way. Then share your experience with us at disabilityworkers@gmail.com. What ideas did the candidate have? Was he or she receptive and thoughtful? Is this someone we could build a relationship with and develop as an ally (because advocacy continues after the election is over)?

#nonprofitsvote

ADWA's election page will continue to develop throughout the election cycle with your help. We will add what we learn as more information comes in. If you find something that would help other disability workers support individuals with disabilities to be informed voters, please share it with us and we will post it. If you share on social media, please help us raise the visibility of non-profits in Alberta's economy by adding the hashtag *#nonprofitsvote* wherever appropriate.

Your future and the future of those you support will be affected by this election. Encourage as many people as you can to vote. If you are eligible to vote, please take the time to vote on election day, by mail-in ballot or in an advanced poll.

Alberta Disability Workers Association

<https://www.adwa.ca/>