

Home Care Support Aides

Prepared for the
Northern Labour Market Information Clearinghouse

November 1996

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Background

The Home Care, or Community Health, departments of Alberta's Regional Health Authorities provide nursing, housekeeping and other services to clients in their own homes. This service allows many people to remain in their own homes rather than be in a hospital or a long-term care facility. With Home Care, clients' progress and drug programs can be monitored by nursing and support staff. Support Aides are a central component of Home Care, providing many services such as housekeeping and help with bathing and eating. They generally ensure that clients are comfortable and safe in their homes.

Other organizations, such as Family and Community Social Services, and private care providers also provide home support. This report, however, will deal only with the Home Care services provided under the auspices of the Regional Health Authorities.

Northern Alberta is served by seven Health Regions:

- ? Mistahia Health Region (No.13), Grande Prairie
- ? Peace Health Region (No.14), Peace River
- ? Northwestern Health Services Region (No.17), High Level
- ? Northern Lights Health Region (No.16), Fort McMurray
- ? Aspen Health Region (No.11), Morinville
- ? Lakeland Health Region (No.12), Vegreville
- ? Keewetinok Lakes Health Region (No.15), High Prairie.

Data sources

The main source of information for this report was a survey of Home Care Managers for the northern health regions conducted in December 1995 and January 1996. Other sources include discussions with administrators at Alberta Vocational College, Edmonton, and with Alberta Health staff.

Census and unemployment data provide some background information. The National Occupational Classification (NOC) includes home care support aides under the title Visiting Homemakers, Housekeepers and Related Occupations (NOC code 6471). Examples of job titles included in this group are Companions, Personal Aides, Visiting Homemaker, Housekeeper, Home Support Worker, and Home-health Aide and Foster Parent. As a result, the information obtained via the NOC code refers to more than Home Care support aides alone. Nonetheless, census and unemployment data do give some indication of the demand for support aides in northern Alberta.

Table 1: Demand Indicators

Area	Avg. U.I. Claimants ¹		CEC Job Orders ²		1991 Census ³	
	1993	1994	1994	1995	Employed	Unemployed
Slave Lake	9	4	5	5	45	0
Grande Prairie	15	15	5	6	185	15
St. Paul	20	17	3	0	20	30
Fort McMurray	8	7	5	8	20	30
Edmonton	158	132	26	30	1505	135

¹ Average U.I. Claimants over the year for the area specified, rounded to the nearest whole number.

² The number of vacancies placed through the Canada Employment Centre in the area. The 1994 and 1995 figures are year-to-date, from January to August.

³ Randomly rounded in increments of five.

The 1991 Census data indicate that home care workers had about average unemployment rates in that year. (The Ft. McMurray numbers are too small to draw reasonable conclusions.) Using more current data, the number of vacancies placed through the Canada Employment Centres are fairly regular and the number of U.I. claimants are low relative to posted positions, especially for northern Alberta areas.

Responses to Survey of Home Care Managers.

Q1. How many Home Care support aides do you have currently on staff and working regularly?

See Table 2.

Q2. How many hours per week do they work, on average?

The vast majority of support aides work part-time, on a casual, or contract basis. Some support aides work almost full-time, while others work only a few hours each month. There are some permanent, part-time positions, but not many. This is generally an “as needed” sort of job, which means that an individual support aide’s hours can vary from week-to-week. In the Mistahia Health Region, 117 support aides work 1500 hours per week, averaging 12.8 hours per week per support aide.

- Q3.a How many support aides did you have one year ago?
 .b How many do you expect to have one year from now?

Table 2: Support Aides Employed in Northern Alberta Health Regions

Health Region	Mistahia	Peace	North-western	Northern Lights	Lakeland	Aspen	Keewee-tinok
Aides on staff	117	37	17	5	113	50	13 (est)
Change from last year	increase from 90	increase from 23	same	same	increased from 82	slight increase	same
Expected change next year	slight increase to 120	increase by 33%	same	increase of 2 or 3	increase to 130	slight increase	increase by 6 or 7

Q4. How quickly does your staff turnover?

Turnover rates range from almost nil to over 50% in the last year. The rate of turnover may have to do with how the regional health authorities meet their staffing demands. For example, the Mistahia Health Region hires aides on a case-by-case basis which means that people are hired and let go as they are needed or not. While this makes their turnover rate look high, most support aides stay with the region for some time, serving different clients. Other regions report that the job's pay range (\$7.13 to \$11.00 per hour) and variable hours lead to a fairly high turnover rate. Many Home Care support aides find this to be an overly insecure situation. Those with regular, part-time positions tend to stay with Home Care for many years.

- Q5.a Ideally, what level and type of training should a support aide have?
 .b What level of training do your support aides have?
 .c What training do you provide?

Applicants for Home Support Aide positions are not usually required to have any specific training. Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) however, are often preferred candidates. After at least three months of employment, home support aides are generally required to take the In-service Training for Home Support Aides (HSA) program provided by AVC Edmonton. This is largely a self-study program with RNs on staff serving as tutors. AVC provides seminars to prepare nurses for this role. This training is paid for by the provincial government through the RHAs. In December 1995, some 643 people in central and northern Alberta were enrolled in this program. The largest portion of those students came from Home Care programs with others coming from Family and Community Social Services, private care providers and "other". The percentage of students from Home Care is expected to grow.

Regional Health Authorities also recognize the Personal Care Attendant (PCA) training provided by AVC Edmonton. Some Home Care managers suggested that a combination of the HSA and PCA programs would be the ideal training for support aides. Just such a course is under evaluation at AVC Edmonton.

Some Home Care Managers stated that they would like to see support aides start work with either the Home Support Aide or Personal Care Aide training. As it is, support aides enter the field with a range of training levels from none to that of Licenced Practical Nurses.

Other sorts of training that would be useful include:

- behaviour management,
- dealing with the emotional issues of palliative and respite care,
- communications and interpersonal skills.

AVC Edmonton is in the process of developing training modules to answer many of these needs.

RHAs provide regular in-service training to their support aides on a monthly to bi-monthly basis, as well as client-specific training given to individual support aides.

At the time of writing, Alberta Health is in the process of conducting a more in-depth study of support workers in health care looking at current skill levels and training needs. A preliminary report on this work should be available in February 1996.

Q6. Do you foresee any major changes in the future for support Aides?

- There will be a demand for more support aides. Probably a 15 to 20% increase over current numbers.
- Support Aides' duties are changing. They do less homemaking and more direct personal care. More jobs, such as changing dressings, are being delegated from nurses to aides.
- There may be an increase in short-term, acute care clients; those sent home from hospital earlier than they once might have been.
- There will likely be an increase in palliative care as well.
- Mental health may be rolled in with Home Care by way of community living workers' work being done by support aides.
- These responsibilities will require greater levels of training, and, as a result, the pay for support aides will probably have to increase.
- Increasing numbers of aides are, and will be, taking further training to help them deal with emotional situations such as arise in palliative care, as well as to learn behaviour management skills.
- Many new support aides come from long-term care facilities that are being cut back.

Implications for Training

- The basic, provincially mandated training for this field has been provided by AVC Edmonton (and AVC Calgary in the south) since 1989. The current review by Alberta Health of the training requirements for health support staff may result in opportunities for other colleges to provide training in this area.
- The increasing complexity of the support aides' job will probably create opportunities for colleges to help provide in-service training, and upgrading courses for those who have completed the Home Support Aide training. This area provides the most promising opportunities for northern colleges.
- While some health authorities would like support aides to have more pre-employment training the market for it will be limited by the unsteady nature of the job. Few people will be willing to pay for training that does not lead to a secure income.
- Alberta Health wants to promote a coordinated approach to the training of health care support staff. Colleges will have to work together in order to avail themselves of new opportunities in this area.

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