



# Personal Support Workers in Alberta, 2023

## Methodology Notes



Canadian Institute  
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# About CIHI's personal support worker data

Health workforce data assists decision-makers in the planning and distribution of health care professionals. Since 2022, the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) has collected data on personal support workers (PSWs). PSWs are defined in CIHI's Health Human Resources Minimum Data Set (HHR MDS) as “workers employed/paid to provide personal care, such as assistance with activities of daily living, instrumental activities of daily living and related health services.”<sup>1</sup> Exact position titles and scopes of work vary across Canada and change over time. Examples include

- Continuing care assistants/aides;
- Personal/health care aides/assistants;
- Nurse aides/assistants; and
- Home and community care workers.

The following PSW companion products are available on [CIHI's website](#):

- *Personal Support Workers in Alberta, 2023 — Data Tables* (XLSX)
- *Recommendations for Advancing Pan-Canadian Data Capture for Personal Support Workers* (PDF)

Other health workforce products are also available on [CIHI's website](#):

- *Nursing in Canada, 2023 — Data Tables* (XLSX)
- *Nursing in Canada, 2023 — Methodology Notes* (PDF)
- *Occupational Therapists in Canada, 2022 — Data Tables* (XLSX)
- *Occupational Therapists in Canada, 2022 — Methodology Notes* (PDF)
- *Physiotherapists in Canada, 2022 — Data Tables* (XLSX)
- *Physiotherapists in Canada, 2022 — Methodology Notes* (PDF)
- *Pharmacists in Canada, 2022 — Data Tables* (XLSX)
- *Pharmacists in Canada, 2022 — Methodology Notes* (PDF)
- *Health Workforce in Canada, 2017 to 2021: Overview — Data Tables* (XLSX)
- *Health Workforce in Canada, 2017 to 2021: Overview — Methodology Notes* (PDF)
- *Health Workforce in Canada, 2022 — Quick Stats* (XLSX)
- A profile of physicians in Canada, 2022 (infographic)
- *Supply, Distribution and Migration of Physicians in Canada, 2022* (data tables, historical data, methodology notes, Quick Stats)
- *National Physician Database, 2021–2022* (payments and utilization data tables, historical payments and utilization data tables, methodology notes)

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## About this document

This document summarizes the basic concepts, underlying methodologies, strengths and limitations of the data. It provides a better understanding of the health workforce information presented in our analytical products and the ways in which it can be effectively used. This information is particularly important when making comparisons with other data sources and when looking at trends over time.

## Data availability

### Personal support workers

Job titles and work requirements for roles related to personal support work vary greatly across Canada because personal support work is largely an unregulated profession. For example, in Alberta, people who do this type of work are referred to as health care aides (HCAs). For the purposes of CIHI reporting, and to maintain continuity between provinces and territories, CIHI uses the term personal support worker (PSW). PSWs provide care and support to optimize and/or maintain an individual's health and well-being, safety, autonomy and comfort. This includes personal care such as assistance with activities of daily living and instrumental activities of daily living, and related health services. Care is mostly provided under the direction of a regulated health care professional, consistent with the client's care plan, and in accordance with legislation, standards, the employee's job description, and the employer's policies, procedures and guidelines. PSWs make up a significant proportion of the health care workforce. As such, they provide care to some of Canada's most vulnerable populations.

## Data collection

There is no widespread agreement on the roles and responsibilities of PSWs, and while some data does exist — in the form of voluntary registries and financial information systems — robust standards for data collection and reporting are not widely used.

Alberta is currently the only jurisdiction to have submitted PSW data to CIHI. The Alberta Health Care Aide (HCA) Directory was created in 2019 and is managed by the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta (CLPNA). Enrolment is voluntary but considered mandatory for those PSWs employed in a publicly funded facility. Data was submitted by the CLPNA as it exists in the directory, since no PSW data standards are in place at CIHI at this time.

Statistics reported by CIHI may differ from those reported by others, even though the source of the data (i.e., annual enrolment) is the same. Variances may be attributed to differences in the population of reference, the collection period, and/or CIHI's data exclusion criteria and editing and processing methodologies.

## Population of interest

The population of interest includes all PSWs who exist in the Alberta HCA Directory at the time of data cut submission to CIHI. The directory has an annual enrolment period for enrolment and renewal, but the deadline is not officially enforced since there is no regulation for this profession. The previous enrolment window of the directory was July 1 to June 30. For the past few years, the enrolment window has shifted to December 1 to November 30. The data cut submitted to CIHI by the CLPNA was done retrospectively for July 1 of every data year submitted.

These inclusion criteria are consistent with those used to collect data for nursing professionals at CIHI, and with the CLPNA's usual methodology to submit data on licensed practical nurses (LPNs) to CIHI.

## Defining the workforce

When referring to health human resources, **supply** usually refers to all who were eligible to practise in the given year. In the case where a profession is regulated, this would include every individual within a regulatory college or body's registry. **Workforce** usually refers to those who are eligible to practise and also employed in the profession at the time of annual registration. Because personal support work is an unregulated profession and enrolment in a registry is not mandatory, it was necessary to establish a clear definition to distinguish the workforce from the supply.

The PSW *supply* includes all PSWs who are listed in the Alberta HCA Directory at the time the data is submitted, based on the following criteria:

- **Active:** Registration was active for the reported year; eligible to practise in the given year in the public and/or private sector, regardless of whether they are employed; and
- **Inactive:** Registration was not active in the directory for the reported year (but was active in the previous enrolment year); not eligible to practise in the public sector. These inactive PSWs may or may not be employed in the private sector or have transitioned to another profession (e.g., nursing). See Appendix B for the counts of inactive PSWs.

The PSW *workforce* includes those in the PSW *supply* who are employed during the enrolment period.

## Data quality

### Under- and over-coverage

- **Enrolment period versus data collection period:** The previous enrolment window of the directory was July 1 to June 30, and there was some flexibility during the COVID-19 pandemic. For the past few years, the enrolment window has shifted to December 1 to November 30. The CLPNA submitted data to CIHI with a cut-off date of July 1, and there may be some under-coverage of PSWs for 2023 since some may have registered after the data was submitted.
- **Restricted reach of registry:** Enrolment in the Alberta HCA Directory is mandatory only for PSWs working in the public sector. Although those working in the private sector are welcome to enrol, the CLPNA has expressed that many do not and therefore there is under-coverage of all PSWs in Alberta. The magnitude of under-coverage is unknown.
- **Not stated:** Not stated rates reflect a case of under-coverage.
- **Out-of-scope records:** Under-coverage occurs when out-of-scope records (i.e., inactive registrants — those who had not updated their enrolment within a particular year) are not included in supply and workforce analyses. Inactive registrants may continue their employment as PSWs in the private sector, because enrolment in the Alberta HCA Directory is not mandatory for those working in the private sector.

# Terminology and general methodology

## Languages

The term *language* refers to any value that was entered as a language in the Alberta HCA Directory. In most cases, these were unique languages. In some cases, multiple dialects or spellings existed and were counted as distinct languages in analysis (e.g., Tagalog, Filipino, Gujarati and Gujrati were counted as separate languages). Additionally, 2 entries (Northern and Western) were counted as 2 languages, and 3 entries, which may have included multiple languages (Sign languages, Other languages and Other Aboriginal languages), were counted as 1 language.

English language proficiency is a requirement for employment as a PSW in Alberta, as indicated on the [Alberta HCA Directory website](#). The enrolment/renewal form asks applicants to list all languages spoken *in addition to English*. Many people entered English in this section. For analytical purposes, English was included in everyone's list of languages spoken, regardless of whether it was specified or not.

## Location of credential received

The location of PSW graduation was determined by the postal code (for Canadian locations) or the country (for international locations) associated with the post-secondary institution address data element. If the location was within Canada, the province/territory was noted and if the location was outside of Canada, the country was noted. Frequencies for Canadian provinces or territories were grouped under *Canadian educated*; frequencies for international locations were grouped under *internationally educated*.

## Primary employment

The term *primary employment* refers to the employment that the PSW has reported as their primary employment. All workforce data and analyses, except number of employers and total weekly hours worked, represent primary employment statistics for PSWs.

## Full-time/part-time status

This term refers only to the status related to the PSW's primary employment.



## Total weekly hours worked

This term refers to the hours worked in a week across all employers (up to 3). This definition was created to exclude PSWs who reported being employed but did not report any hours (they are grouped under *not stated*).

## Workforce geography

A postal code analysis was performed to determine whether a PSW was working in an urban or rural/remote setting. Where applicable, the postal code used is that of the primary employer's address. If the postal code is unknown or invalid, the value defaults to *not stated*. Using Statistics Canada's Postal Code Conversion File (PCCF), postal codes are assigned a statistical area classification (SAC) type value based on the 2021 Census. The SAC groups census subdivisions (CSDs) according to whether they are a component of a census metropolitan area (CMA), a census agglomeration (CA) or a census metropolitan influenced zone (MIZ). CIHI uses the following categorization of SACtype as a standard methodology to define urban and rural/remote in reporting products:

- Urban: SACtype = 1, 2, 3 (i.e., within a CMA/CA)
- Rural/remote: SACtype = 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 (i.e., strong/moderate/weak/no MIZ)

# Comparability

As part of the data submission process, data providers submit to CIHI the changes that have been made to their data. A review of this information is helpful when looking at trends over time and comparing provinces and territories. Table 1 highlights the PSW data submitted to CIHI by province and territory.

**Table 1** PSW data submitted to CIHI, by province and territory, 2019 to 2023

Year	N.L.	P.E.I.	N.S.	N.B.	Que.	Ont.	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	B.C.	Y.T.	N.W.T.	Nun.
2019	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/r	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2020	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	D	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2021	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	D	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2022	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	D	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2023	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	D	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

#### Notes

n/a: Not available; data not submitted.

n/r: Not reportable; data excluded due to data quality issues.

D: Record-level data was submitted to CIHI.

#### Source

Health Workforce Database, Canadian Institute for Health Information.

## Data limitations and considerations

Methodological and historical changes to the data can potentially make it difficult to compare data across time. In collaboration with the data providers, CIHI is continually striving to improve data quality; therefore, the following information should be considered when making historical comparisons and consulting previous CIHI publications. In all cases, comparisons should be made with caution and in consideration of methodological and historical changes.

The section below provides information on the data elements that may or may not have an impact on comparability.

### PSW data, 2020 to 2023

#### Supply and workforce

Province/territory	Data limitation
Alberta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data on supply and workforce was likely to be under-reported since enrolment is mandatory only for PSWs working in the public sector. PSWs who work in the private sector are not mandated to register in the Alberta HCA Directory to maintain employment.</li> <li>• The workforce declined between 2021 and 2022. According to the CLPNA, this decline can be attributed to the decrease in the total enrolment of students in PSW programs. The decrease in new graduates may be due to the following:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Introduction of an updated, longer and more expensive curriculum, combined with low pay (as low as \$17/hour)</li> <li>— Increased program entry requirements (especially with respect to English competency)</li> <li>— No active clinical placements</li> </ul> </li> <li>• In 2023, the methodology for determining the supply was enhanced to include only active PSWs, instead of including both active and inactive PSWs. This update has been applied to data for the entire reporting period (2020 to 2023).</li> </ul>

#### Demographics

Province/territory	Data limitation
Alberta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• According to the CLPNA, some retired registered nurses (RNs) and LPNs are choosing to work in retirement as PSWs because they want to continue providing bedside care.</li> </ul>

#### Employment

Province/territory	Data limitation
Alberta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The pandemic, restrictions on working at a single site, and data collection issues with employers at renewal had an impact on the data collection process. Consequently, there were missing values of <i>not stated</i> under <b>Place of Work</b>. The corresponding information for 2022 should be used with caution when comparing with previous years.</li> <li>• In 2023, data quality improvements were made to employment-related data since the creation of the HCA Directory in 2019.</li> </ul>

# Appendices

## Appendix A: List of PSW data providers, 2023

Province/territory	Data providers
Newfoundland and Labrador	n/a
Prince Edward Island	n/a
Nova Scotia	n/a
New Brunswick	n/a
Quebec	n/a
Ontario	n/a
Manitoba	n/a
Saskatchewan	n/a
Alberta	College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta
British Columbia	n/a
Yukon	n/a
Northwest Territories and Nunavut	n/a

**Note**

n/a: Not available; data not submitted.

**Source**

Health Workforce Database, Canadian Institute for Health Information.

## Appendix B: Inactive PSW registrants, 2020 to 2023

Province/territory	2020	2021	2022	2023
Alberta	95	1,677	4,907	3,551

**Source**

Health Workforce Database, Canadian Institute for Health Information.

# Reference

1. Canadian Institute for Health Information. [\*Health Human Resources Minimum Data Set, 2022 — Data Dictionary\*](#). 2023.

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