



# Personal Support Workers in Alberta, 2022

## Methodology Notes



Canadian Institute  
for Health Information

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For permission or information, please contact CIHI:

Canadian Institute for Health Information  
495 Richmond Road, Suite 600  
Ottawa, Ontario K2A 4H6  
Phone: 613-241-7860  
Fax: 613-241-8120  
[cihi.ca](http://cihi.ca)  
[copyright@cihi.ca](mailto:copyright@cihi.ca)

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# Table of contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| About CIHI's personal support worker data . . . . .  | 4  |
| About this document . . . . .                        | 5  |
| Data availability . . . . .                          | 5  |
| Personal support workers. . . . .                    | 5  |
| Data collection . . . . .                            | 6  |
| Population of interest . . . . .                     | 6  |
| Defining the workforce . . . . .                     | 6  |
| Data quality . . . . .                               | 7  |
| Under- and over-coverage . . . . .                   | 7  |
| Terminology and general methodology . . . . .        | 8  |
| Languages . . . . .                                  | 8  |
| Location of credential received. . . . .             | 8  |
| Primary employment . . . . .                         | 8  |
| Full-time/part-time status . . . . .                 | 9  |
| Total weekly hours worked . . . . .                  | 9  |
| Workforce geography . . . . .                        | 9  |
| Comparability . . . . .                              | 10 |
| Data limitations and considerations . . . . .        | 11 |
| Appendix: List of PSW data providers, 2022 . . . . . | 12 |
| Reference . . . . .                                  | 12 |
| Bibliography . . . . .                               | 12 |

# 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 piloted data collection 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 are changing 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, 2022 — 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, 2022 — Data Tables* (XLSX)
- *Nursing in Canada, 2022 — Methodology Notes* (PDF)
- *Occupational Therapists in Canada, 2021 — Data Tables* (XLSX)
- *Occupational Therapists in Canada, 2021 — Methodology Notes* (PDF)
- *Physiotherapists in Canada, 2021 — Data Tables* (XLSX)
- *Physiotherapists in Canada, 2021 — Methodology Notes* (PDF)
- *Pharmacists in Canada, 2021 — Data Tables* (XLSX)
- *Pharmacists in Canada, 2021 — 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, 2021 — Quick Stats* (XLSX)
- A profile of physicians in Canada, 2021 (infographic)
- *Supply, Distribution and Migration of Physicians in Canada, 2021* (data tables, historical data, methodology notes, Quick Stats)
- *National Physician Database, 2020–2021* (payments and utilization data tables, historical payments and utilization data tables, methodology notes)

Feedback and questions are welcome at [hhr@cihi.ca](mailto:hhr@cihi.ca).

For more information, please contact

Health Human Resources  
Canadian Institute for Health Information  
495 Richmond Road, Suite 600  
Ottawa, Ontario K2A 4H6  
Phone: 613-241-7860  
Email: [hhr@cihi.ca](mailto:hhr@cihi.ca)  
Website: [cihi.ca](http://cihi.ca)

## 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, as part of a pilot demonstration project. 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. In contrast, **workforce** usually refers to those who were 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 *workforce* is defined as all PSWs who are enrolled in the Alberta HCA Directory and are identified as being active and employed during the enrolment period. This contrasts with *supply*, which includes all PSWs (active or inactive) who are listed in the Alberta HCA Directory at the time the data is submitted, based on the following criteria:

- **Active:** Registration has been 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; not eligible to practise in the public sector; and may be employed or not employed in the private sector. The directory carries over data from the previous year; inactive PSWs are included in the supply for the following year but are removed in subsequent years (i.e., more than one year of inactivity).

## 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 2022 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:** Over-coverage occurs when out-of-scope records (i.e., inactive registrants — those who had not updated their enrolment within a particular year) are included. For this reason, workforce analyses included only active PSWs. However, for supply analyses, both active and inactive PSWs were included.

# 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 were summated for each province and territory; frequencies for international locations were grouped under "international."

## 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, ranging from 1 to 80 hours. This definition was created to exclude PSWs who reported being employed but did not report any hours as well as those who reported a number of hours worked weekly outside of an expected range (i.e., more than 80 hours).

## 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, postal codes are assigned to statistical area classifications (SACs) — urban or rural/remote. Urban areas are defined (in part) by Statistics Canada as communities with populations greater than 10,000 people; rural/remote is equated with communities outside the urban boundaries and is referred to as rural and small town (RST) by Statistics Canada. The methodology for mapping urban and rural boundaries has been enhanced to align with CIHI's data standards.

Categories may be interpreted in the following manner:

- Urban: SACtype = 1, 2, 3
- Rural/remote: SACtype = 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

# 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 2022

| 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   | 30,801 | 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   | 36,175 | 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   | 39,396 | 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.

#### 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 2022

#### 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> </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> </ul> |

## Appendix: List of PSW data providers, 2022

| 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.

## Reference

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

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**CIHI Ottawa**

495 Richmond Road  
Suite 600  
Ottawa, Ont.  
K2A 4H6  
**613-241-7860**

**CIHI Toronto**

4110 Yonge Street  
Suite 300  
Toronto, Ont.  
M2P 2B7  
**416-481-2002**

**CIHI Victoria**

880 Douglas Street  
Suite 600  
Victoria, B.C.  
V8W 2B7  
**250-220-4100**

**CIHI Montréal**

1010 Sherbrooke Street West  
Suite 602  
Montréal, Que.  
H3A 2R7  
**514-842-2226**

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cihi.ca

35058-0623

