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***Building the Social Services Workforce  
of the Future***

***April 2013***

**Submitted by: Human Services Workforce Alliance**

Revised Apr. 16/13

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## **Introduction**

Premier Alison Redford has initiated the development of a Social Policy Framework to guide Alberta's journey into the future. Delivery of services by community agencies is an important component of animating that framework and providing vulnerable Albertans with the best service possible to help them realize their potential.

The Ministry of Human Services was charged in 2012 with developing a vision and a set of strategies for addressing issues in the human services workforce. An initial group was brought together comprised of representatives of the Ministry and organizations associated with delivering services to Alberta's vulnerable populations. Called the Human Services Workforce Alliance, this group of dedicated senior representatives has been working together over the past ten months to create a short-term set of actions required to deal with current issues and also develop a longer-term vision and strategies for sustaining the workforce, making it a desirable career, and transforming the way services are delivered to Albertans.

This document represents the second of those deliverables – a strategic plan to address the longer-term sustainability of the workforce.

The members of the Alliance are listed on the next page.

**Workforce Alliance Members**

Brenda Lee	Doyle	Co-chair and Assistant Deputy Minister	Disability Services Division	Human Services
Mark	Hattori	Co-chair and Assistant Deputy Minister	Child Intervention Program Quality and Supports Division	Human Services
Blair	Addams	Manager	Contracting Services, Disability Supports Division	Human Services
Danielle	Aubry	Acting Executive Director	Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services	
Rhonda	Barraclough	Executive Director	Alberta Association of Services for Children and Families	
Tim	Bear	Board President	Alberta Disability Workers Association	
Joni	Brodziak	Executive Lead	Outcome Based Services, Child and Family Services Delivery Division	Human Services
Russ	Dahms	Executive Director	Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations	
Cindy	de Bruijn	Executive Director	Gateway Association	
Helen	Ficocelli	President	Alberta Council of Disability Services (ACDS)	
Danica	Frazer	President	Alberta Association of Services for Children and Families	
Anne	Hughson, PhD	Director and Associate Professor	Community of Rehabilitation and Disability Studies, Faculty of Medicine, University of Calgary	University of Calgary
Shannon	Marchand	Assistant Deputy Minister	Community and Voluntary Services Division	Culture
Jim	Menzies	Executive Director	Persons with Developmental Disabilities Program	Human Services
Ann	Nicol	CEO	Alberta Council of Disability Services (ACDS)	
Erin	Palashniuk	Coordinator	Calgary Fetal Alcohol Network	
Jan	Reimer	Executive Director	Alberta Council of Women's Shelters	
Susan	Taylor	Assistant Deputy Minister	Family Violence, Prevention and Homeless Supports Division	Human Services
Bruce	Uditsky	Chief Executive Officer	Alberta Association for Community Living (AACL)	

Katherine	van Kooy	President and CEO	Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations	
Tim	Weinkauf	Director	Program Development and Innovation, Persons with Developmental Disabilities Program	Human Services
Sharlyn	White	Executive Director	Family and Children Support Services Association of Alberta	

## **Why This Plan is Necessary**

The Alberta Government (GOA) Ministry of Human Services (Child and Family Services, Disability Services and Family Violence Prevention and Homeless Supports Divisions) works with hundreds of families and community agencies to deliver these vital services to vulnerable Albertans. In turn, families and community agencies attract, recruit, develop and retain staff from Alberta's labour force to deliver needed services.

However, there are a number of pressures which affect government and community stakeholders' ability to effectively deliver services. As examples, Alberta's economy is growing, unemployment rates are declining and labour costs are rising. Community agencies and families report significant difficulty attracting, recruiting, developing and retaining sufficient numbers of qualified staff, largely because of low wages paid by ministry contractors during challenging fiscal climate (e.g. Budget 2013).

As a result of low wages, some areas of the sector which delivers services to vulnerable Albertans shows turnover rates in 2010 of 34% and a recent Alberta study showed that 57% of staff left within one year of starting employment in the sector. This type of issues produces staff shortages, affecting service delivery, but it also puts a strain on employers, diverting scarce resources to recruiting constantly.

But compensation is only part of the story. Other issues have been identified:

- Alberta's booming economy provides many opportunities for people to earn more money, but also to have more satisfying jobs.
- Lack of training and advancement opportunities are clearly negative factors in attracting and retaining staff.
- Aging in our society produces more complexity in service provision; without proper support, staff can feel frustrated and demotivated.
- Cultural differences between service providers and their clients can create issues that need to be addressed through training and sensitivity awareness.
- Some staff see this sector as a stepping-stone to either better paying jobs; no shift work and something more satisfying; they want a career not just a job.

All of the above calls for a well-trained cadre of workers. As stated in a recent report:

*“Individuals and families expect workers to be knowledgeable about specific disabilities, see to the physical needs of the individuals they support...support individual development, develop community networks, provide daily living support at home, in the work place and in the community and facilitate health care management.”<sup>1</sup>*

Without the full system in place, the sector will continue to do the best it can, but will increasingly fail to meet expectations. Unless these issues are addressed, and a comprehensive strategy developed and implemented, Alberta will face a significant shortfall in service providers and the quality of service provided to this sector. The GOA recognizes that sectors providing services to vulnerable Albertans will not sustain unless wage pressures are addressed and until an effective workforce strategy is developed, implemented and evaluated, year over year.

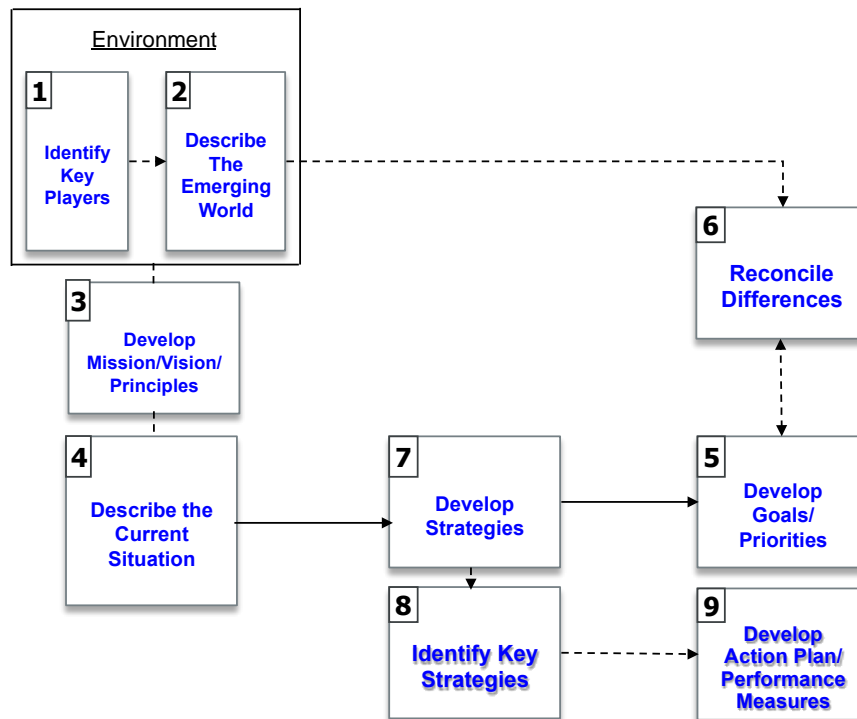
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<sup>1</sup> ACDS: *“Community Supports for Adults with Disabilities: The Challenges and Opportunities”*  
August 2007

## The Model Used

In developing the plan the Alliance used a model called Directional Planning. A graphic of the model is shown below:

### A Model of the Process



The members of the Alliance brought their understanding of the environment to the discussions. The Mission/Mandate was provided by the Terms of Reference written by the Ministry. Together, the group developed a vision statement, taking into account the Social Policy Framework being developed by the Government of Alberta. The current situation was described by the members in a series of interviews and summarized for further discussion.

A set of “domains” was identified, these being areas of interest that were critical in the development of a future workforce. These domains were:

1. Education/Training
2. Professional Designation
3. Recruitment/Retention
4. Innovation
5. Quality/Culture
6. Compensation
7. Funding Model

For each of these the group described what they expected as the future state. The gap then between the current situation and the future state produced the need for bridging strategies. These strategies were reviewed for criticality, and a final set of major strategies assembled. These are described in this document.



## Our Mission and Vision

### *Workforce Alliance Mandate/Mission*

The Ministry of Human Services engaged community agencies, families and other stakeholders to form an ongoing alliance called the Workforce Alliance. The objective was to take a strategic approach to the sector and to recommend ways to ensure its health and sustainability<sup>2</sup>.

The scope of the Alliance was to focus on workforce issues that relate to the following:

- Education of the workforce (post-secondary education)
- Attraction of qualified staff
- Recruitment of staff for community agencies and families
- Development (ongoing training and development for existing staff)
- Retention of community agency and family staff
- Culture within the sector.

### *Workforce Alliance Vision*

The Social Policy Framework (SPF) serves as a guiding document for the Workforce Alliance. The SPF describes the future direction of social policy in Alberta. By working to develop a common direction, an understanding of roles and responsibilities, and a basis for action and decision-making, the SPF describes how we create hope and opportunity for all Albertans by working together to improve social outcomes.

The SPF has stated its vision as follows:

Alberta is a place where everyone contributes to making our communities inclusive and welcoming; where all people enjoy opportunities to fulfill their potential and benefit from our strong social, economic and cultural life.

If the SPF is to achieve its intended goals, its authors recognize that they will need to transform service delivery, innovate, and engage people. It will have to build upon a social service delivery workforce that is educated, motivated, capable and willing to

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<sup>2</sup> The Alliance was also asked to recommend to the Ministry how best to allocate the investment the GOA had committed to the a subset of these contracted service providers in a fair and efficient way.

strive for higher levels of service to Albertans. Building and sustaining this workforce is the mandate of the Workforce Alliance.

The Workforce Alliance expects to work cooperatively to elevate the workforce to the highest possible level. In fact, our vision is this:

*A sustained delivery sector contributing to a high quality of life for Albertans, through:*

- *A skilled, well supported, professional workforce*
- *A strong network of non-profit and voluntary community service providers*
- *Applying innovation to service delivery*
- *Being flexible and adaptable*

This vision requires that the following conditions be met:

- People are attracted to the sector because it provides an opportunity to contribute to the well-being of people and make a difference in their lives
- Workers are compensated at a fair and equitable level
- Workers have access to advancement opportunities, as well as educational improvements
- Workers are supported by professional administration and available technology
- Agencies and workers have the flexibility to innovate to create better models of service delivery.
- Processes are in place to measure outcomes and make improvements.

A way to measure success of our vision having been achieved is that the workforce is valued by service recipients and by all Albertans.

## **The Future and the Transformation Required**

In the past change has come largely from improved productivity. We know that there are few opportunities left in this area. In order to meet the intended future expressed by the Social Policy Framework and the Alliance's vision, it is important that the sector transform itself from one looking for productivity improvements to one that has a new view of the purpose and outcomes expected.

It must move from being organized around "service delivery" to being focused on the "well being" of Albertans. This involves concepts such as:

- People capacity
- Community capacity
- Client-centred outcomes
- Working back to the determinants of health and tying programs and delivery to the outcomes that will make a difference.

This will require moving from a medical model for disabilities and other vulnerable groups that describes a set of procedures to one that can describe the outcomes expected and then can put in place the policies, people, and processes to transform the work of the providers. It will involve a paradigmatic shift by the collective of government, service providers, employees and volunteers. It is a major initiative, but is critical to the underpinnings of the future we expect to design.



To achieve this future, the Alliance has identified the following key domains. Change will have to come in each of these domains in order to transform the sector.

1. Quality/Culture
2. Education/Training
3. Professional Credibility
4. Recruitment/Retention
5. Innovation
6. Compensation
7. Contracting Model

There is a strong relationship between the domains and the principles expressed in the Social Policy Framework, as shown in the table below. This provides confidence that we are on the right track in working through the domains and the strategies resulting.

SECTOR DOMAINS	SOCIAL POLICY FRAMEWORK PRINCIPLES							
	PROMOTING DIGNITY	RECOGNIZING MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY	FOSTERING ACCOUNTABILITY	VALUING DIVERSITY & INCLUSION	ENCOURAGING A FOCUS ON CITIZEN'S NEEDS	SHIFTING EFFORTS TO PREVENTATIVE APPROACHES	WORKING IN COLLABORATION	PROMOTING HEALTHY & STRONG RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS AND WITHIN FAMILIES
QUALITY/CULTURE								
EDUCATION/TRAINING								
PROFESSIONAL DESIGNATION								
RECRUITMENT/RETENTION								
INNOVATION								
COMPENSATION								
FUNDING MODEL								

**Legend**

 = Sector action will address directly  
 = Sector action will have influence  
 Unshaded = No relationship

The desired future state is described below for each domain.

### 1. Quality/Culture

Success requires a quality orientation and a culture that is built upon quality. This cultural orientation would be built upon the philosophy of the Social Policy Framework. Attributes of a successful model would be:

- Agencies behave according to a stated set of principles; among these would be:
  - Employees are engaged in their work and contribute to innovation within it
  - They see the work not as charity but as productive effort
  - The focus is the client, not the system
- Employees understand the principles and perform their work in accordance with them, resulting in clients valuing the service
- There is a balance of male and female service providers overall, and where appropriate in individual situations.
- Tools exist to measure performance
- Employee backgrounds match those of the clients, so that they can understand the needs of the clients
- Collaboration among service agencies is supported by a common language

### 2. Education/Training

A professional workforce requires educated people. The sector must provide opportunities for people to acquire and maintain the best skills. It must also recruit people who have these skills. A sector that is successful in this area would have the following:

- Standard packages of education and training, based on best practices, have been developed and are available to staff
- Specialization streams have been developed and are available to staff, where applicable.
- These programs are tied in to professional designation so that staff can see their progression path in the sector
- Tangible rewards are provided for successful completion of educational and training programs
- Institutions (secondary and post-secondary) are a part of the educational provision system, including special training for smaller sectors
- Programs recognize the emerging environment in Alberta, including:
  - Multicultural service providers and clients
  - The special needs of all clients and especially the disabled
  - Increasing complexity in all aspects of the sector
- The needs of learners are recognized and programs are designed to meet them:
  - Variety of delivery methods and learning schedules
  - Use of technology
  - Collaborative learning opportunities, integrated into the workplace

In sum, we expect the sector to embrace a culture of learning, with organizations as learning organizations, all resulting in people actually using the programs available.

### ***3. Professional Credibility***

A professional workforce should be recognized as such by the public and respected for the work it does. This may involve professional recognition and in some cases a professional designation. In order to achieve this, we expect:

- Clear scope of practice identified and defined, with skills and competencies described and agreed
- An agreed code of ethics

### ***4. Recruitment/Retention***

A sustained sector requires people who have experience, training and an ability to provide excellent service to Albertans. This is possible only if the sector can attract and retain good people. In fact, evidence shows that retention improves quality. Without this, the agencies are forever turning over staff and working to bring them up to a certain level of performance. Characteristics of such a sustainable sector are the following:

- Leaders see the merits of recruitment and retention and improve their performance through:
  - Being very good, sophisticated employers

- Working actively to help their employees turn their passion into a career
- Providing career path opportunities
- Meeting needs of shift workers
- Actively recruiting men to balance the workforce
- Providing EAP and other forms of employee assistance and wellness programs
- An overall sector thrust ensures that students throughout the educational progression see this sector as a viable career choice
- Targeted recruitment produces the best people vying to work in the sector
- Efforts are made to produce equality in the sector.
- Employees are provided exchange opportunities to encourage learning (e.g. between GoA and agencies)

The result is that employees feel safe, happy and see the benefits of staying in the sector and making their career there.

## ***5. Innovation***

People want to work where they can make a difference. Doing the same thing the same way does not lead to satisfaction. People must be encouraged to think of new ways, applying their creativity to improve service and heighten productivity. Research has shown that innovation makes a difference – in service, in costs and in outcomes. Characteristics of this would be:

- Increased use of technology where this improves service or increases productivity
- Levering capacity by engaging the various communities (the public, governments and corporations)
- Capturing innovative ideas and finding ways to scale them up to the full sector
- Making innovation a part of the educational curricula
- Creating an environment in which innovation is encouraged; this means allowing flexibility, encouraging risk taking and providing opportunities to share thinking

All of the above will raise the level of innovation in the sector. A measure of success is that the sector is seen to be innovative, and is looked to for ideas by other organizations.

## ***6. Compensation***

It is clear that compensation must be at a level that allows for sustainable life, and ultimately is competitive with comparable work elsewhere. Only as compensation

levels reach viable levels will the sector be able to successfully implement the other goals in this document.

Characteristics of success for a viable compensation model would be:

- Salaries and benefits are competitive with the overall market (this may include, in some instances, the Government of Alberta)
- Supportive processes that:
  - Allow for comparison of wages with the market and measure any gap
  - Provide increases regularly, rather than sporadically, through a predictable negotiations process
  - Address regional disparities
  - Produce gender equality in wages
  - Recognize specialized skills where appropriate

### ***7. Contracting Model***

Funding, allocation and contracting are related themes. The current contracting process is one that has evolved to meet specific needs. Now, it is a web of processes that differ by sector, by agency and by program. It is desirable that there be a considered approach to contracting that begins with the overall goal of how to provide services to Albertans to ensure the best outcomes. Funding follows the contracting process and must be reconciled to these same goals.

Characteristics of a productive contracting/funding model are:

- Processes that are regular, predictable and durable
- Allow for agency autonomy and flexibility, including partnering with other community organizations and with corporations as appropriate
- Based on agreed outcomes, rather than inputs or processes
- Have clear definitions for administration and operating costs, with stable, predictable and multi-year funding
- Build upon the Government's articulation of what it means by each of the terms of *performance, procurement, outcomes and measures*
- Developed in a cooperative spirit with the contracted sector
- Based upon what is best for the client and produce desirable outcomes for the client
- Define a level of baseline services for Albertans
- Apply standard business rules (e.g. encouraging agencies to work productively by making them responsible for their budgets overall, including under/overages)
- Align funding mechanisms to goals.

## **RESULTING STRATEGIES**

The Domains in the previous chapter and the descriptions of their future states provided the basis on which to measure the gap between the current situation and the desired future state. The Alliance discussed potential strategies and developed a long list of strategies. These were then sorted into categories and the final set of significant strategies agreed. These most significant strategies are presented below. They are presented in two categories -- Transformation and the seven Domains.

### 1. Transformational Strategy

*Strategy #1 -- Describe the workforce of the future*

*This major strategy is the foundation for all of the other strategies. It will require government, service providers and families working together to describe the transformed workforce of the future. Definitions will be developed and challenged, roles identified, business models created, and new leadership styles discussed. Finally, actions will have to be developed to implement this model.*

### 2. Supporting Strategies by Domain

#### a. Culture/Quality

Transforming the sector will require a change in the very culture of the way business is done. As one member of the Alliance said, partners (including government and the service sector) will have to be reflective, responsive, flexible, innovative, willing to partner and willing to learn. This will not come about easily. It will require developing a view of what is quality, how to measure it, how to embed it into service delivery organizations, and how to sustain it.

*Strategy #2 – Strengthen a culture of quality in the sector*

*This strategy will involve:*

- *Translating the principles of the Social Policy Framework into ones for the sector*
- *Researching quality service provision in other jurisdictions*
- *Creating a baseline of quality existing in the sector*
- *Developing measurement tools to capture quality indicators and sector performance against the indicators*



- *Identifying technological and other tools that can assist service delivery staff to provide higher quality care*
- *Investigating ways to enhance quality care*

b. Education/Training

A transformation of the sector will require elevating education and training overall. Current employees will have to have access to educational opportunities; the sector overall will have to develop recruitment standards that call for a higher level of entry education.

*Strategy #3 – Maintain and improve educational opportunities for the sector*

*This strategy proposes the Alliance working with the post-secondary institutions of the province, to maintain and improve the education of the workforce. This will involve describing the educational standards and job competencies required making this a part of the strategic plan of the post-secondary institutions, and ensuring the resources are available to provide the education and training to sector employees. It will also involve cooperation with research institutions to identify “best practices” both in Alberta and in other jurisdictions, and translating these into ongoing educational materials. It will require leadership on the part of sector principals and government to encourage a culture of education within the sector.*

c. Professional Recognition

Elevating the standards in the sector could lead to recognition of educational and job performance achievement. Professional recognition is one way to acknowledge such achievement.

*Strategy #4 – Strengthen the professional credibility of the workforce*

*For some jobs in the sector, it might be desirable to have some forms of recognition. The suggested route is to create a forum for discussion among Government, post-secondary institutions and sector leaders, and agree on the applicable jobs, and the competencies and education that would lead to recognition. This could involve informal modes of recognition, through certification and perhaps, for some jobs, designation.*

#### d. Recruitment/Retention

Sustainability requires effective recruitment of people who are interested in being part of the sector, and then retaining them. Without this latter, the sector is constantly recruiting and training, draining scarce resources to work that is not oriented to directly serving people with needs.

*Strategy #5 – Focus efforts on retention of employees*

*This broad strategy has many components:*

- *Ensuring competitive wage and benefits to employees*
- *Creating a sector of choice by recognizing generational needs and expectations, and by providing financial incentives, such as bursaries*
- *Engaging staff in discussions about how to improve working conditions*
- *Creating opportunities to advance within the sector*
- *Promoting the sector to attract the best employees*
- *Collecting information on promising practices across the sector (together with common definitions and labour market information) and a mechanism to share.*

#### e. Innovation

We know that we have to innovate to meet our vision and improve service to Albertans. But we also need the funding and the space to do this innovation.

*Strategy #6 – Create a culture of continuous innovation*

*We expect to work together and with other partners to create funding and space for courageous and bold innovation. This will include acceptance of new models, piloting and proof of concept work, and engaging in action-based research. We expect that some of these will fail and we will not only tolerate failure, but will seek to learn from it. We will also work on scaling mechanisms to take pilots to implementation across the sector. Finally, we will develop a repository of current and promising practices across the sector and a process to share innovations.*

#### f. Compensation

Compensation is the most obvious element in causing turnover in the sector. Raising compensation alone will not achieve the vision, but it is an important factor contributing to success or lack of it.

*Strategy #7 – Address compensation issues in the sector*

*While there are many specific ideas on how to address the compensation issue in the sector, they all have three components that will be key to the actions we take:*

- *Provide a competitive wage to employees*
- *Explore innovative compensation packages*
- *Build a foundation of data to support requests and decisions on compensation.*

#### g. Contracting Model

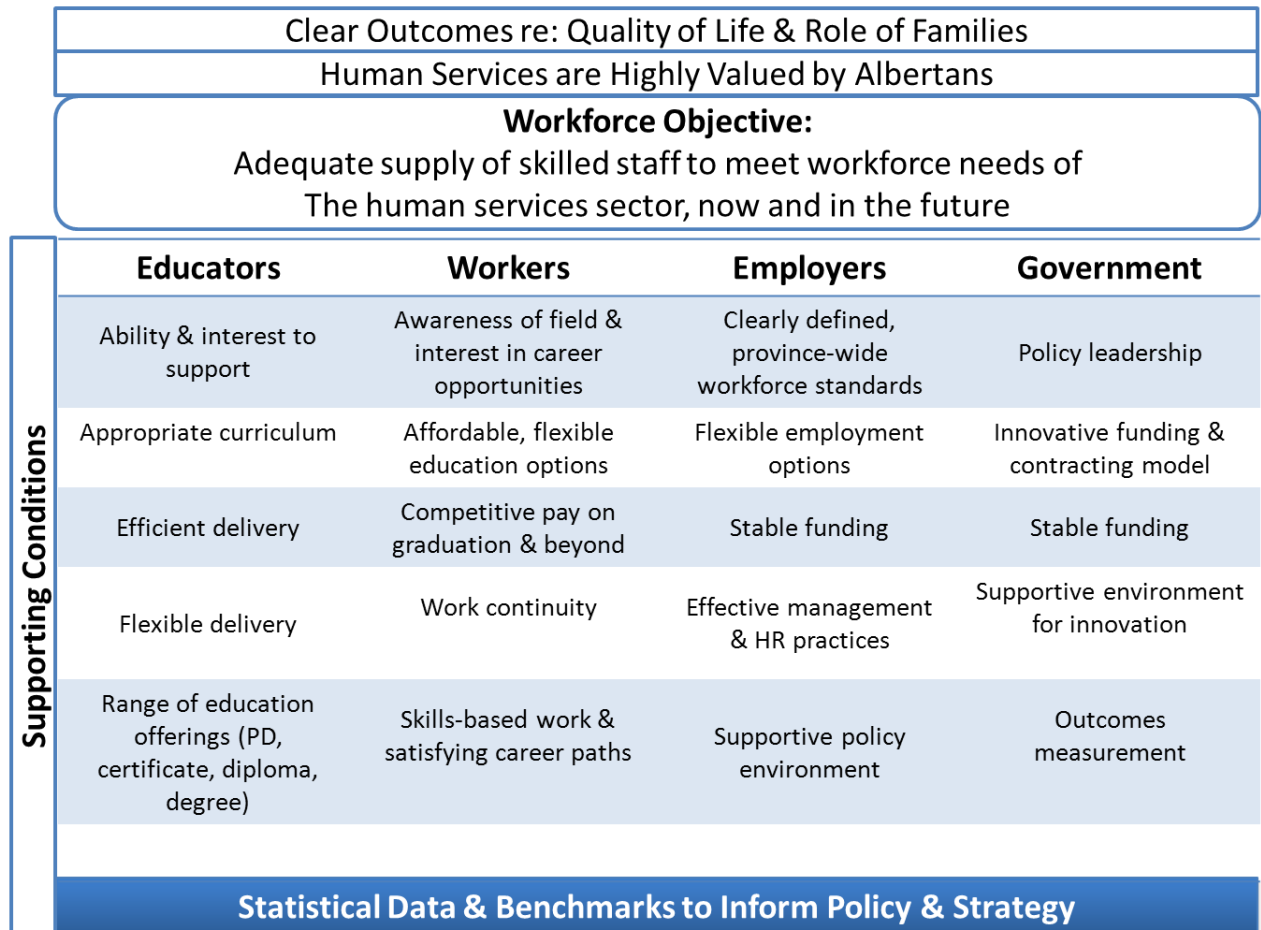
A new funding/allocation/contracting model is required to sustain the sector. Innovation in this model would include items such as a harmonized standard contract, funding based on outcomes not lowest cost or RFPs, with more flexibility allowed in carrying out the work, with value assigned to qualitative measures as well as quantitative ones, with geographic differences taken into account, and with incentives provided to encourage innovation.

*Strategy #8 – Develop an innovative funding, allocation and contracting model to sustain the sector building on the learnings from the other strategies*

## **A FINAL NOTE**

Implementation of the strategies in the preceding chapter will have the effect of putting the sector on a trajectory to success. Working to a new vision with partners involved is the key. It is a huge task, but one that we must undertake if the sector is to become sustainable and a meaningful participant in the goal of improving the lives of Albertans.

This inter-relationship among the partners and the segmentation of the vision into inputs and processes is shown in the logic model below<sup>3</sup>



The point of the chart is to demonstrate that each partner in the model has something to contribute. Success will require an integrated approach with all making a contribution.

<sup>3</sup> Extracted and expanded from a session held in August 2011 by ACDS and the post-secondary institutions.