SOCIAL WORKERS

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Suggested Citation:
Mirshahi, R., & Baczkowska, M. (2023). Social Workers. Optometrists. In I.Bourgeault (Ed.), *Introduction to Health Occupations in Canada* (p. 451-470). Ottawa: Canadian Health Workforce Partners, Inc.

Social Workers

Introduction

Social work is an applied academic discipline and a regulated profession dedicated to individual and social change (International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], 2020). At its core, it aims to assist and empower individuals, families, groups and communities to enhance their health and social well-being (Canadian Association of Social Workers [CASW], 2020a).

Drawing on theories and approaches from human and social sciences as well as Indigenous knowledge systems (CASW, 2005a), social workers typically work in public or publicly funded settings where they collaborate with other professionals or are self-employed in private practise. Social workers consider all aspects of the lives of the people they help, including their material, social and cultural circumstances (CASW, 2020b).

Social work has developed considerably since its origins, evolving into a multifaceted field that engages with a wide range of issues, populations and processes through direct and indirect interventions. Despite this variety, social work is unified by its deep concern for social justice—a principle that is embedded in the CASW's Code of Ethics (CASW, 2005b).

History of the Profession

The development of social work in Canada is intricate as it has been shaped by Indigenous, French and English histories and traditions, as well as multicultural perspectives. While the Indigenous peoples had their own practises of healing and helping, Western European settlers brought with them and imposed their own worldviews.

The origins of social work as a profession emerged in the late 1800s as an extension of the white European colonial settlement project. However, the French Roman Catholic and the English Protestant populations in North America influenced the evolution of social work in different ways (Fortier & Hon-Sing Wong, 2019; Ives et al., 2020). Social work in Canada has also been affected by the arrivals of diverse immigrants and refugees (Valtonen, 2008).

The profession's expansion in Canada mirrors that of other nation-states during that period. It largely arose as a response to those affected by poverty and overlapped with the socioeconomic changes generated by the Industrial Revolution, particularly the establishment of the wage-labour system (Jennissen & Lundy, 2011). The historical transformation of social work can be divided into three major phases: the era of moral reform (from the formation of Canada to 1890); the era of social reform (1891–1940); and the era of applied social science (1941–present) (Hick, 2006).

Women, typically European migrants or their descendants, have played an integral role by running and participating in many social care initiatives (Jennissen & Lundy, 2011).

The era of moral reform

Prior to Confederation in 1867, social assistance came from private charities that were operated by members of religious orders and volunteers (Drover, 2013). It is possible to differentiate between two distinct directions that took divergent approaches to social work.

The first direction was locally driven by Protestant missionary groups and was dedicated to the salvation of souls. It inspired the creation of charity organizations across Canada—mainly led by businessmen and upper-class women—that saw the plight of the socioeconomically disadvantaged as a result of their individual shortcomings. This gave rise to categorizations such as "deserving" and "undeserving" poor.

The second direction appeared among newly settled migrants and was driven by mutual aid and solidarity. It generated the settlement house movement as well as community and social justice work. By the onset of the twentieth century, most major Canadian cities had settlement houses. Some of the first schools of social work were also tied to settlement house workers (Hick, 2006).

The era of social reform and applied social science

Social work as an academic discipline and profession was consolidated between 1891 and 1940. During this period, social support transitioned from being a private, volunteer-run charity to public social welfare, funded by the government and delivered by trained and paid workers. It was informed by a secular and scientific rather than a religious and moralistic worldview. This shift was made official in 1914 when the first formal social work training, guided by human and social sciences, was introduced at the University of Toronto. In Québec, McGill University started its social work program in 1918. The first organization that launched the use of social casework was the Social Service Commission in Toronto, which later became the Social Welfare Division of the Department of Public Health (Hick, 2006; Jennissen & Lundy, 2011).

The professionalization of social work was broadened in 1926 with the founding of the CASW. By the 1920s, social workers also began specializing in areas such as hospital-based care and psychiatry. By the 1930s, during the Great Depression, social workers were increasingly engaged in community work to assist those who were unemployed, homeless or hungry. Since this difficult period urgently called for national intervention, the Canadian government eventually acknowledged the significant economic role of social welfare. In subsequent years, it legislated various social welfare measures, such as old-age pension, unemployment insurance and benefits for persons with disabilities.

By the mid-1970s, Canada had become a modern welfare state. This generated employment in the administration and delivery of these new initiatives, altering the nature of social work by turning it into a state-centred enterprise. Today, social work continues to be influenced by the social welfare system in a very complex fashion (Hick, 2006; Jennissen & Lundy, 2011).

Canadian Association of Social Workers

The CASW is the national professional association for social workers. Its mandate is to support and promote the profession of social work and to advance issues of social justice. Founded in 1926 "to monitor employment conditions and to establish standards of practise within the profession" (CASW, n.d.), it continues to offer direction in the professionalization of social work. According to its 2020–2022 strategic plan, the CASW aims to ensure that "the social work profession is respected as a unique, diverse, and credible profession, in Canada and internationally" (CASW, 2020d).

Within Canada, the CASW advances its agenda through coalitions and committees, consultations with governmental and non-governmental actors (including the general public), and position papers and briefs. It is a federal association that consists of provincial and territorial partner organizations represented on the CASW Board of Directors (one appointed member per provincial or territorial association). Social workers within each of these associations automatically become members of the CASW (CASW, n.d.; Hick, 2006).

Regulation of the Profession

In Canada, the regulation of social work falls under the jurisdiction of provincial/territorial authorities. They differ in their legislation and the requirements necessary to qualify for the title of Registered Social Worker (RSW) or Licensed Social Worker (LSW), as well as in their organizational framework, activities and priorities (CASW, n.d.). Despite these differences, they hold consistent standards across the country. Table 1 lists the provincial and territorial organizations that regulate social work.

TABLE 1: Social work regulatory authorities for each jurisdiction in Canada

Jurisdiction	Regulatory authority	Year of regulation
British Columbia	British Columbia College of Social Workers (BCCSW)	1969
Alberta	Alberta College of Social Workers (ACSW)	2003
Saskatchewan	Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers (SASW)	2005
Manitoba	Manitoba College of Social Workers (MCSW)	2009
Ontario	Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW)	2000
Québec	Ordre des travailleurs sociaux et des thérapeutes conjugaux et familiaux du Québec (OTSTCFQ)	1960
New Brunswick	New Brunswick Association of Social Workers (NBASW)	2019
Nova Scotia	Nova Scotia College of Social Workers (NSCSW)	1963
Newfoundland and Labrador	Newfoundland and Labrador College of Social Workers (NLCSW)	1992
Prince Edward Island	Prince Edward Island Social Work Registration Board	1988
Northwest Territories	Professional Licensing Government of the Northwest Territories Department of Health and Social Services	2012

Ten provinces have independent regulatory authorities. In the Northwest Territories, social work legislation falls under the responsibility of the regional government's Department of Health and Social Services. There is currently no registration to practise as a social worker in Yukon or Nunavut (Association of Social Workers in Northern Canada (ASWNC), 2020). These regulatory authorities are also responsible for:

- Setting admission, registration criteria as well as practise standards;
- Monitoring the work carried out by RSWs;
- Requiring RSWs to maintain their professional competence; and
- Publishing ethical guidelines (CASW, 2020e).

Regional differences in regulation

Except for Yukon and Nunavut, those who wish to become a registered or licensed professional must register with a provincial or territorial association (Association of Social Workers in Northern Canada [ASWNC], 2020; CASW, 2020c). Many provinces or territories consider an undergraduate degree from an accredited educational institution as the minimum prerequisite to enter the profession, but educational and/or linguistic requirements vary based on jurisdiction.

The regulatory authority of Alberta carries its own list of accepted educational programs (Alberta College of Social Workers [ACSW], 2022). In British Columbia, candidates wishing to practise must successfully complete a licensure exam to receive their social work title (British Columbia College of Social Workers [BCCSW], 2021). In the Northwest Territories, students need to obtain a Certificate in Social Work

(as opposed to an undergraduate or graduate diploma/degree) to be eligible to become an LSW. In Québec, aspiring social workers must also demonstrate their proficiency in French as dictated by provincial law to qualify for registration (Ordre des travailleurs sociaux et des thérapeutes conjugaux et familiaux du Québec [OTSTCFQ], 2022).

Scope of Practise

The scope of social work practise can be portrayed in many ways. Aside from being outlined by the mission/purpose of the social work profession and its regulation or licensure, it can be delineated by various dimensions, which are listed in Table 2 (Birkenmaier et al., 2011). The definition of a social worker provided by the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW), for example, captures some of these aspects. A social worker is viewed as a professional who "assesses, diagnoses, treats and evaluates individual, interpersonal and societal problems through the use of social work knowledge, skills, interventions and strategies, to assist individuals, dyads, families, groups, organizations and communities to achieve optimum psychosocial and social functioning" (OCSWSSW, 2008; Ontario Regulation 383/00, s. 9 (1)).

TABLE 2: Social work scope of practise

Dimensions	Examples
Practise settings	Institutional and non-institutional health and social services: hospitals, mental health programs, addiction treatment facilities, family and child welfare agencies, group homes, social assistance offices, palliative and end-of life-care
Practise settings	Government services: development and administration of social services/programs/policies, correctional facilities, justice system
Practise settings	Community services: community health centres, grassroots organizations
Practise settings	Learning institutions and professional associations: social work education, research and evaluation, leadership, advocacy and professional development
Practise settings	Private practise/self-employment: counselling and psychotherapy
Positions and roles	Case manager, clinical counsellor, group facilitator, community worker, public servant, advocate, broker, mediator, negotiator, collaborator, coordinator, evaluator, activist, educator, researcher, public speaker
Activities	Assessing and addressing individual and/or structural issues, developing a psycho-educational group, facilitating an empowerment group, assisting families, advocating for policy change, implementing social policies, evaluating a social service/program
Practise competencies	Ethical, theoretical, scientific, experimental, contextual (i.e., social, cultural, economic, political) and personal knowledge, values and skills
Service user groupings	Individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities, including people affected by poverty or homelessness, people affected by domestic violence, people with disabilities, children and youth, couples, older adults, Indigenous peoples, LGBTQ2S+ people, ethnocultural communities, veterans and military families
Practise frameworks	Various processes involved in different phases of social work practise (not necessarily linear): engagement, assessment and planning, intervention, termination and evaluation
Internal tensions	Clinical vs. non-clinical/structural approaches, social control vs. social change, maintenance of vs. opposition to status quo, expert vs. non-expert power-sharing stance

Sources: Birkenmaier et al., 2011; CASW, 2020b; Hick, 2006; OTSTCFQ, 2019.

The educational requirements needed to work in certain practise settings, positions and roles, and with certain practise frameworks and service user groupings, can vary considerably. The varying circumstances might require additional specializations related to a specific population or a theoretical and methodological approach. The supervision of social work interns typically requires a master's-level education and multi-year practise-based experience. A doctoral degree in social work is the norm for academic research and higher-level non-academic careers. While many social work competencies are acquired during formal education, employment and ongoing professional development, some may reflect the personal experiences of a practitioner and/or emerge from informal learning (Hick, 2006).

Although the scope of social work practise is extensive and multifaceted, the CASW Code of Ethics is central to its pursuits. The set of principles that it comprises guides social workers in their various tasks, responsibilities and objectives. These "core social work values" (CASW, 2005a, pp. 4–8) are presented in Figure 1.

Education and Training

Across Canada, there are several university-based social work programs that are typically delivered by Schools of Social Work. These undergraduate and graduate programs vary by duration, entry requirements, and focus or specialization. Admission to higher education programs in social work tends to be flexible and considers applicants' prior education, work and/or volunteer experiences. This explains the differences in program length for some students. Applicants with a more relevant background to social work may require less instruction time. The duration of education also depends on students' decisions regarding advanced specializations or degrees.

Undergraduate programs

The standard duration for a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) is four years, except in Québec where it is three years post-CÉGEP. BSW programs are generalist or foundational. Their curriculum covers a wide range of basic social work theories and skills, preparing students for entry-level professional social

Figure 1: Core values of social work in Canada

Deprofessionalization and scope creep

In regions where regulated social work titles are not enforced, there is evidence of an increasing "deprofessionalization" of social work. This entails the employment of individuals outside of the profession in positions and roles typically meant for a social worker. In some social, health and community services, social work openings are staffed by allied professionals and paraprofessionals with on-the-job training. Deprofessionalization also involves the creation of new jobs with titles associated with social work but not performed by registered employees.

As a result, "scope creep" (i.e., the delineation of social work positions and roles using other professional designations) is common and often results from budgetary constraints. Because unregulated professional titles are unprotected, service users must be wary of the credentials of service providers to safeguard their safety and wellbeing (Trocmé, 2016). However, in light of the profession's settler-colonial origins, social workers that enforce a decolonizing or Indigenous lens call attention to the need for even more deprofessionalization, that is, "the restructuring of the 'helping' practises of social work back under the control of communities themselves" (Fortier & Hon-Sing Wong, 2019, p. 437).

work practise, more advanced social work or social work-related education. In most jurisdictions, an undergraduate degree is the standard educational requirement to become a registered professional. Given the importance of direct professional experience, students must successfully complete an unpaid work term or internship called a practicum. Practicums often take place in the last year of study (i.e., third or fourth year) and allow students to apply acquired social work competencies in real-life situations and contexts.

Graduate programs

Graduate-level social work studies open the door to more professional or scholastic opportunities. They consist of a master of social work (MSW) and a doctorate (PhD) in social work.

Master of social work (MSW)

The standard duration of an MSW is two years and includes coursework and practicums. It covers more advanced social work knowledge and skills with a core curriculum that is more specialized in focus. MSW holders can find their preferred area of practise or service user grouping of interest, bypass entry-level positions, and expect higher salaries once entering the workforce.

Doctor of philosophy (PhD) in social work

Unlike BSW and MSW programs, doctorate programs do not have to abide by the same standards for accreditation. The average duration of a doctoral degree is between five to seven years. Coursework is usually completed during the first semesters, with the remainder of the degree dedicated to a student's supervised research project. Schools of Social Work offer teaching and/or research opportunities to doctoral students who wish to work in academia. A PhD in social work prepares candidates for careers in higher education and research as well as for leadership positions and roles in their area of expertise in either direct practise or public policy.

Specializations/certificates

Some larger higher education institutions offer possibilities for specialized social work education or certification in different areas such as children and families, gerontology/aging studies, social service administration, clinical interventions, community work, and social justice and diversity. While the emphasis on Indigenous systems of knowledge is increasingly common, it is more likely for institutions to dedicate an entire program to Indigenous social work or partner with Indigenous organizations. This is important given the history of settler colonialism and the Eurocentrism embedded in social work in Canada (Ótiskewápíwskew, 2009).

Appendix 1 lists programs that are accredited by the Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE) through its Commission on Accreditation (CASWE, 2022). Canadian learning institutions that wish to offer social work education must adhere to the standards for accreditation (CASWE, 2014; 2021).

In addition to the Indigenous educational opportunities, certain programs are accredited by the National Indigenous Accreditation Board (NIAB, 2020). In 2019, the CASWE and NIAB jointly agreed to accept degrees from their respective social work programs (CASWE, 2019). Four programs are currently recognized under this agreement: Maskwacis Cultural College, UnBQ — University nuhelot'įne thaiyots'į nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills, Red Crow Community College, and Yellowhead Tribal College (CASWE, 2022). The province of Alberta also recognizes additional college programs. While these are not accredited by CASWE, they are supported by Alberta's regulatory authority, which now recognizes 12 social work programs (ACSW, 2022).

Internationally educated social workers

Most Canadian higher education institutions accept international students and tend to have admission quotas (i.e., a certain number of accepted Canadian and international students) to fill. Those who began their social work education abroad but wish to complete their studies in Canada can do so by applying directly to their institution of choice.

Those who arrive in Canada with a completed social work degree and are interested in working as an RSW must have their educational and/or professional background assessed. The evaluation of non-Canadian academic qualifications is provided by the CASW. Some province-specific organizations/authorities recognize other foreign credentials, including World Education Services in Ontario (OCSWSSW, 2022), the International Qualifications Assessment Service in Alberta and the International Credential Evaluation Service in British Columbia (PrepareforCanada, 2018).

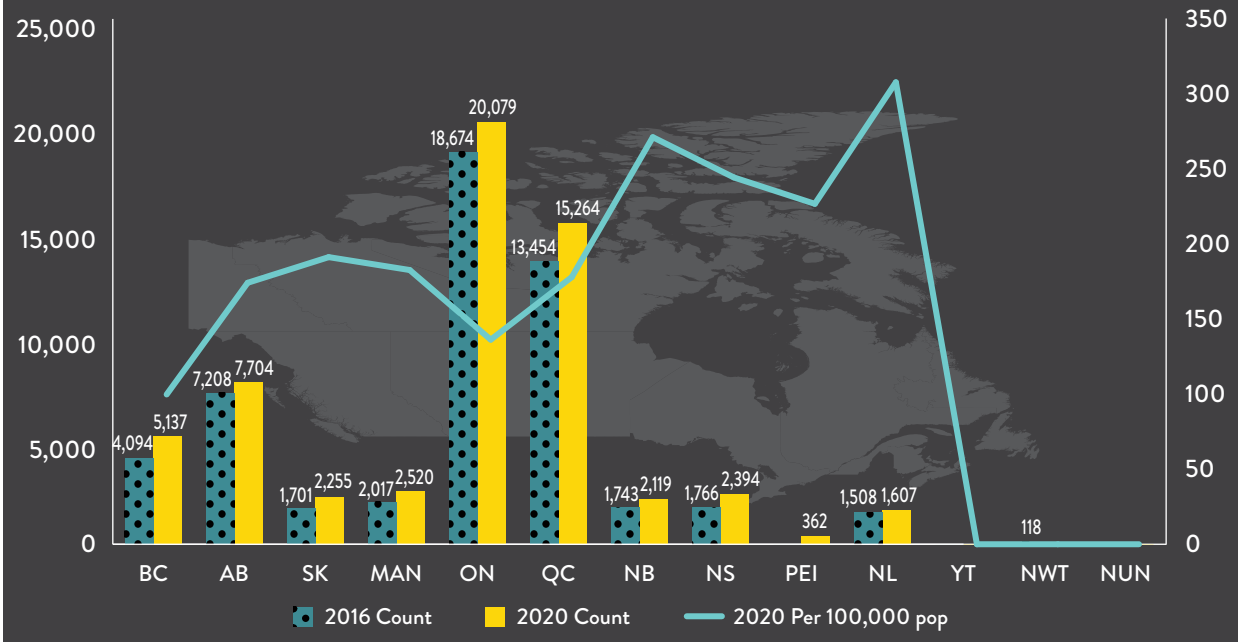
Demographics

Demographic data obtained from the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) allows for the analysis of various statistics per province and territory, including the total number of social workers in the country, the total number of social workers per 100,000 population and the percentage of social workers identifying as female.

As indicated in Figure 2, there was a rise in the total number of social workers in Canada between 2016 and 2020. While the overall growth during this period was not drastic and reveals fluctuations, it does show a steady increase. The top three provinces with the highest number of social workers in 2020 were Ontario (20,079), Québec (15,264) and Alberta (7,704).

The total number of social workers per capita in Canada has been rising more consistently. As demonstrated in Figure 2, the regions with the highest number of social workers do not have the highest number of social workers per capita. Between 2016 and 2020, the regions with the highest number of social workers per 100,000 population were those with the lowest number of social workers overall. In 2020, these regions were Newfoundland and Labrador (307.8 social workers per 100,000 population), New Brunswick (271.2 social workers per 100,000 population) and Nova Scotia (244.4 social workers per 100,000 population).

Figure 2: Social worker—counts and per population rates in Canadian provinces/territories, 2016 and 2020



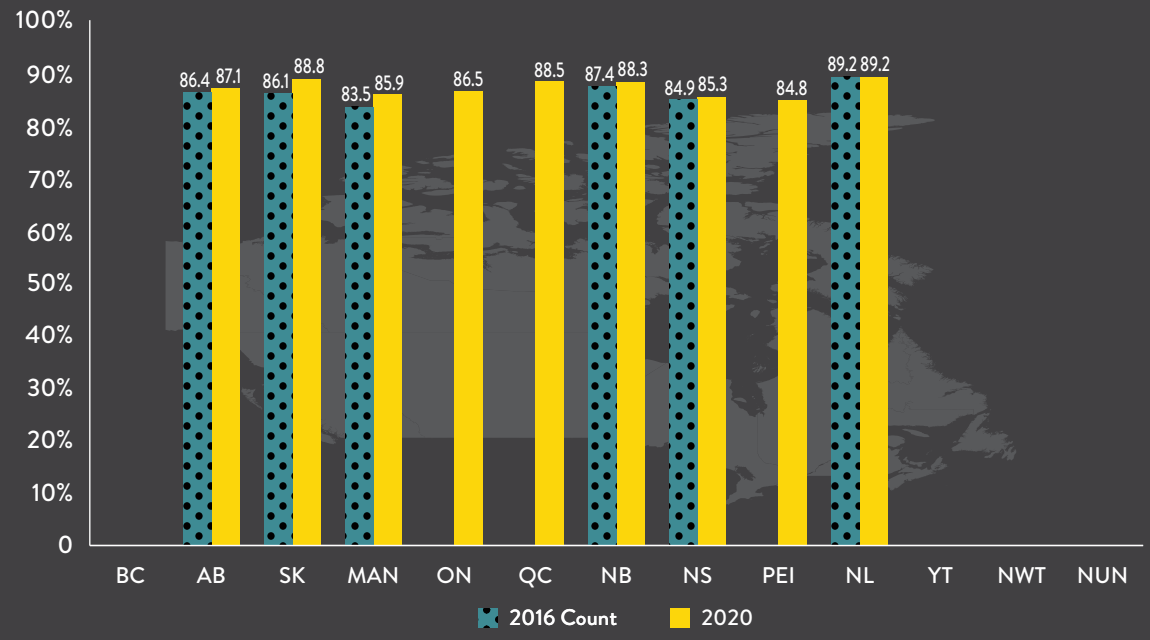
Source: Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2022, Health Workforce Database.

While there is less data on the gender distribution in social work, it is clear that the profession is predominately female.[1] This is unsurprising as social work is part of a group of professions that have been traditionally performed by women. As shown in Figure 2, in 2020, the regions with the highest percentage of female social workers were Newfoundland and Labrador (89.2%), Saskatchewan (88.8%) and Québec (88.5%).

Demographic data on the chronological age distribution of social workers in 2020 (see Figure 4) shows that, on average, 14% of social workers were younger than 30, 74% were between the ages of 30 and 59, and 12% were above the age of 60 (CIHI, 2022a).

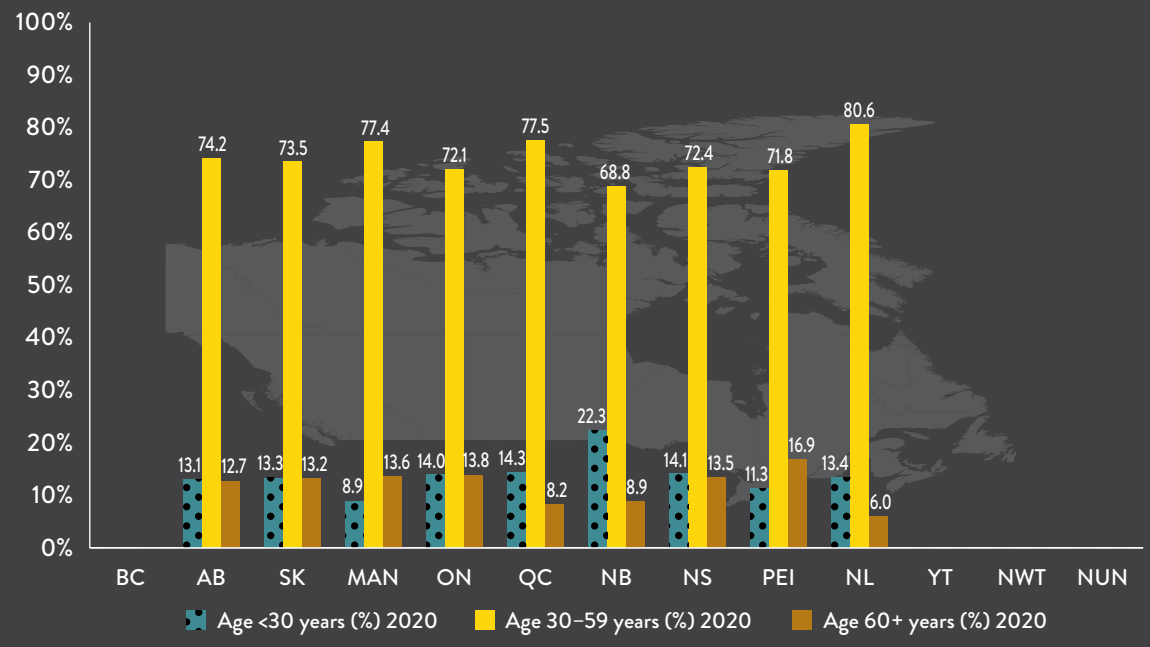
1 In the 2021 Census, Statistics Canada began using a new gender standard that also accounts for gender identity rather than solely "sex at birth" which uses the binary categories of "female" and "male" (CIHI, 2018, pp.16–17). Understanding gender as a social construct, certain terminology considerations that vary from traditional sex demographics include "female gender", "male gender" and "gender diverse" (CIHI, 2018, pp.18–19; 2021, p.63).

Figure 2: Proportion of social workers who identify as women, by Canadian provinces and territories, 2016 and 2020



Source: Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2022, Health Workforce Database.

Figure 4: Chronological age distribution of social workers by Canadian provinces/territories, 2020



Source: Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2022, Health Workforce Database.

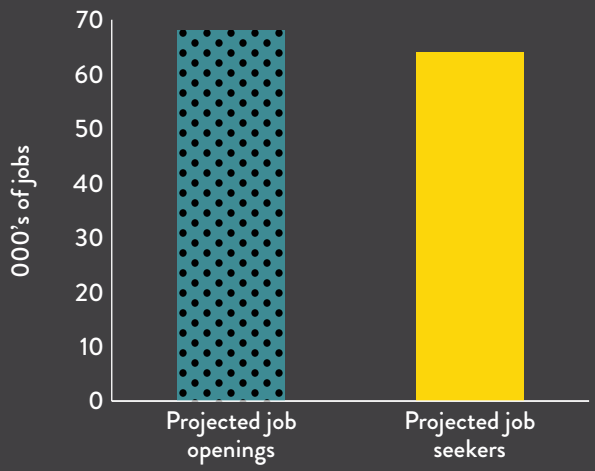
Demand and Remuneration

According to the Government of Canada's Canadian Occupational Projection System, which draws upon data from the National Occupational Codes (not CIHI data compiled from regulators), there will be approximately 67,700 job openings for social workers between 2019 and 2028. Over that same period, number of job seekers is estimated to be 64,200 (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017). These estimates are illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Projection of cumulative job openings and job seekers, 2019–2028

	Level	Share
Expansion demand:	38,700	57%
Retirements:	22,500	33%
Other replacement demand:	3,200	5%
Emigration:	3,300	5%
Projected job openings:	67,700	100%
	Level	**Share**
School leavers:	50,200	78%
Immigration:	7,000	11%
Other:	6,900	11%
Projected job seekers:	64,200	100%

Source: Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017.



According to this data, it appears that social work is an increasingly popular profession, particularly among younger people. Overall, the numbers of job openings and job seekers are projected to be at relatively similar levels over the 2019–2028 period (Government of Canada, 2021). The highest demand for social workers is predicted to be in Alberta, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Nunavut, Prince Edward Island and Québec (Government of Canada, 2021).

These estimates, however, do not consider the number of social work graduates who may pursue careers in other professions and/or exit the field. Therefore, the data may not accurately represent the number of RSWs or LSWs.

A reduction in public budgets may be the greatest constraint on future social work employment opportunities. In addition, the latest government projections do not consider the short-, medium- and long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic as they were published prior to it. Recent studies suggest that "two years into the pandemic, the demand for social workers in health care has never been greater" (Dunne & Henderson, 2022).

Social work and mental health

As the need for mental health and substance use services grows across Canada, social workers are in "critical demand" (Dunne & Henderson, 2022). As the nation's largest group of mental health providers, they work in highly diverse areas such as assessment, referrals, crisis intervention, counselling and psychotherapy (CASW, 2022; OASW, 2006). With clinical institutions already stretched beyond their limits, there is mounting evidence of decreasing job satisfaction and burnout among frontline practitioners. A survey completed by 3,528 social workers across Canada revealed that 75% of practitioners working in child welfare reported unmanageable workloads. Those who were no longer working in child welfare testified that unmanageable workloads (45%) or stress, compassion, fatigue or vicarious trauma (45%) influenced their decision to leave the profession (CASW, 2018).

A recent study also found significant dissatisfaction among mental health and addiction social workers because of "a sense of being disempowered, voiceless and devalued within a hierarchy of service provision" (Brown et al., 2022, p. 15). More precisely, they disclosed having difficulties in reconciling "the dissonance between their professional training, which emphasizes social justice and relational strategies that are client-centred, and the dominant biomedical model in the mental health system." There are appeals to transform the existing mental health and addiction service architecture to better accommodate "the complexity and diversity of people's struggles" (Brown et al., 2022, p. 15).

Social work wages

Wages for social workers vary based on the nature of employment (full-time vs. part-time; permanent vs. contractual) and workplace settings (institutionalized vs. non-institutionalized). Social workers in Canada typically earn between $43,680 and $93,600 annually, or $21 to $45 per hour (Government of Canada, 2021). The most important determining factors in remuneration are the level of education and the extent of practical experience. Table 8 shows that wages (low/median/high) vary more drastically within regions than among regions. For example, Alberta has both the highest ($48.52/hour) and the lowest hourly wage ($21.63/hour).

Because most registered social workers are employed in the public sector, many receive basic benefits such as paid sick days, vacation time and health insurance with dental coverage (Skilled Immigrant InfoCentre, 2019).[2] Self-employed practitioners need to arrange their own benefits. Registered social workers also enjoy membership benefits from their professional association, such as reduced group rates for health, home or auto insurance, as well as various educational or professional opportunities (CASW, 2021).

TABLE 3: Current social work wages in Canada

Community/Area	Low Wage ($/hour)	Median Wage ($/hour)	High Wage ($/hour)
Canada	22.0	35.00	46.10
Alberta	21.82	26.00	49.15
British Columbia	23.76	37.00	45.00
Manitoba	20.00	34.13	45.00
New Brunswick	21	34.78	40.00
Newfoundland and Labrador	31.04	38.46	46.70
Northwest Territories	N/A	N/A	N/A
Nova Scotia	23.08	36.06	45.70
Nunavut	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ontario	21.98	35.00	49.41
Prince Edward Island	24.04	34.10	40.00
Québec	21.42	33.52	45.04
Saskatchewan	23.00	33.70	40.75
Yukon	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: Government of Canada, 2021.

2 This is dependent on the nature of the employment contract.

Topical Issues for Social Workers

Decolonization, reconciliation and Indigenous rights

The social work profession in Canada finds itself in a paradoxical position: while it is deeply concerned about social justice and human rights, through settler colonialism and Eurocentric systemic/institutional structures and practises, it has itself perpetuated social injustice and human rights abuses. Social workers and social work groups also perpetuated negative stereotypes of Indigenous populations, endorsed, participated in and/or funded residential schools (Baskin & Sinclair, 2015; CASW, 2019; Ótiskewápíwskew, 2009).

Some social work organizations, such as the CASW, have since publicly apologized for taking part in the oppression of Indigenous peoples and have made the path to reconciliation their priority (CASW, 2019). Some of the ways in which social work associations have begun to walk this path include a critical revision of social work curricula and organizational documents, collaboration with and empowerment of Indigenous peoples, and the expression of support for Indigenous social movements.

Black Lives Matter and racial justice

Alongside global movements for Black lives and Black voices in discussions around equity, inclusion and diversity, Black peoples in Canada are denouncing the omission or denial of racial discrimination in the multicultural mosaic and calling for more education about the histories of enslavement, segregation, displacement and marginalization of generations of African Canadians (Jean-Pierre & James, 2020; OASW, n.d.).

More attention should be paid to the negative effects of anti-Black racism in the daily lives of Black communities (Benjamin et al., 2010). Social work practitioners, educators and researchers expose racial injustices at different levels of social services—such as individual-based microaggressions and institutional, structural, cultural and epistemological racism—that affect racialized service providers and users (Weinberg & Fine, 2022). Further, conversations are being held to expand social work's scope of practise to address existing injustices. Social workers can also play a significant role in finding answers to matters related to police brutality and racial profiling (Giwa, 2018; Giwa et al., 2020; Multan, 2020).

Social work and the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic is as much a social disaster as a biomedical one (Connell, 2020). Although no one is immune to the virus, it has been notably devastating for undervalued and underserved populations, exposing injustices and inequalities in the social determinants of health. It has also exacerbated existing socioeconomic disparities and generated new ones. While social work (and social sciences in general) have been eclipsed by the disciplines of biomedicine in pandemic-focused discourses, social work has not only been exposed to individual and collective harms caused by COVID-19, but its capacities have also been challenged and extended because of it.

The pandemic forced social services to quickly adapt to new realities, both in terms of service delivery and drastic rises in demand for support in already under-resourced programs. In addition, public health measures such as social distancing, isolation and quarantine have upset social work's deep commitment to human relationships. These sudden adjustments produced injurious effects on frontline practitioners (Amadasun, 2020; CASW, 2022; Nissen & Scheyett, 2022; Sen et al., 2022).

There is evidence that burnout and moral distress have increased as social workers struggle to accommodate these shifts ethically and professionally and separate their professional and personal lives (Ashcroft et al., 2021, pp. 15–16). The pandemic has also affected social work educators, students and researchers, mainly by moving their activities online. This brought new challenges for teaching and developing social work knowledge and skills as well as conducting research (Sen et al., 2022).

Although social work has been confronted by an ever-growing digital workload before COVID-19, the pandemic has created a fertile ground for new developments. For example, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is starting to make an appearance in health and social services, including social work education (Asakura et al., 2020). The pandemic has also urged us to think about our collective future—locally and globally. Social work, like many other professions, must now re-assess how to move forward to meet the complexities of the social and natural world (Nissen & Scheyett, 2022).

Conclusion

Overall, the evolution of social work in Canada is typified by its changing classification: from the eras of moral and social reform to today's era of applied social science. The profession's pursuit of relevance and coherence over the years has largely occurred against the backdrop of tensions related to its position as both an academic discipline and a professional practise. It has also had to wrestle with disputes emerging from its concern for both the individual and the social. At its core, the desire to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others has always been the most distinguishing feature of social work, whether with individuals, groups or on a wider scale.

Acknowledgements

Parts of this material are based on data and information provided by the Canadian Institute for Health Information. However, the analyses, conclusions, opinions and statements expressed herein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Canadian Institute for Health Information.

Acronyms

ACSW	Alberta College of Social Workers
ASWNC	Association of Social Workers in Northern Canada
BCCSW	British Columbia College of Social Workers
CASW	Canadian Association of Social Workers
CASWE	Canadian Association for Social Work Education
IFSW	International Federation of Social Workers

LSW	Licensed Social Worker
MCSW	Manitoba College of Social Workers
NBASW	New Brunswick Association of Social Workers
NIAB	National Indigenous Accreditation Board
NLCSW	Newfoundland & Labrador College of Social Workers
NSCSW	Nova Scotia College of Social Workers
OCSWSSW	Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers
OTSTCFQ	Ordre des travailleurs sociaux et thérapeutes conjugaux et familiaux du Québec
RSW	Registered Social Worker
SASW	Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers

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Appendix 1: Accredited Social Work Programs in Canada

TABLE 4: Accredited Social Work Programs in Canada

Location	Educational Institution	Program(s)	Duration of Program
British Columbia	Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (with Thompson Rivers University)	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW/BISW)	4 years
British Columbia	Thompson Rivers University	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)	4 years
British Columbia	University of British Columbia (Okanagan Campus)	Master of Social Work (MSW)	1–2 years
British Columbia	University of British Columbia (Vancouver Campus)	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)	2 years
British Columbia	University of British Columbia (Vancouver Campus)	Advanced Master of Social Work (MSW)	1–2 years
British Columbia	University of British Columbia (Vancouver Campus)	Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Social Work	4 years
British Columbia	University of Northern British Columbia	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) Specializations: Indigenous; Child Welfare	2–2.5 years
British Columbia	University of Northern British Columbia	Master of Social Work (MSW)	2 years
British Columbia	University of Northern British Columbia	Indigenous Child and Youth Mental Health Graduate Certificate	0.5–1 year
British Columbia	University of the Fraser Valley	Social Service Worker Diploma	2 years
British Columbia	University of the Fraser Valley	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)	4 years
British Columbia	University of the Fraser Valley	Master of Social Work (MSW)	2 years
British Columbia	University of Victoria	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)	4 years
British Columbia	University of Victoria	Master of Social Work (MSW)	1–1.5 years
British Columbia	University of Victoria	Master of Social Work Advanced (MSWA)	1.5–2 years
British Columbia	University of Victoria	Master of Social Work Indigenous Specialization (MSWI)	1.5–2 years
British Columbia	Vancouver Island University	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)	4 years
British Columbia	Vancouver Island University	Diplomas: Child and Youth Care, Child and Youth Care First Nations, Early Childhood Education and Care, Leadership and Disability Studies, Social Services	2 years
Alberta	MacEwan University	Social Work Diploma	2 years
Alberta	MacEwan University	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)	4 years
Alberta	University of Calgary	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) – Virtual	2 years
Alberta	University of Calgary	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) – Calgary	2 years
Alberta	University of Calgary	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) – Edmonton	2 years

Location	Educational Institution	Program(s)	Duration of Program
Alberta	University of Calgary	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) – Lethbridge	2 years
Alberta	University of Calgary	Master of Social Work (MSW): Clinical Social Work Practise; International and Community Development, Leadership in the Human Services	2–3 years
Alberta	University of Calgary	Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Social Work	4 years
Saskatchewan	First Nations University of Canada	Certificate of Indigenous Social Work	2 years
Saskatchewan	First Nations University of Canada	Bachelor of Indigenous Social Work (BISW)	4 years
Saskatchewan	First Nations University of Canada	Master of Indigenous Social Work (MISW)	1 year
Saskatchewan	University of Regina	Master of Social Work (MSW)	2.5–3 years
Manitoba	University of Manitoba	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) – Fort Garry	2+ years
Manitoba	University of Manitoba	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) – Distance Delivery	3+ years
Manitoba	University of Manitoba	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) – Inner City Social Work ACCESS	4+ years
Manitoba	University of Manitoba	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) – Northern Social Work ACCESS	3+ years
Manitoba	University of Manitoba	Master of Social Work (MSW)	2 years
Manitoba	University of Manitoba	Master of Indigenous Social Work (MISW)	2 years
Manitoba	University of Manitoba	Ph.D in Social Work	4–6 years
Ontario	Algoma University	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)	4 years
Ontario	University of Ottawa	Honours with Specialization in Social Work (French only)	4 years
Ontario	University of Ottawa	Master's in Social Work (French only)	2 years
Ontario	University of Ottawa	Doctorate in Social Work	6 years
Ontario	Carleton University	Honors Bachelor of Social Work (HBSW)	4 years
Ontario	Carleton University	Master of Social Work	2 years
Ontario	King's (Western) University	Honours Bachelor of Social Work (HBSW)	4 years
Ontario	King's (Western) University	Master of Social Work (MSW)	1–2 years
Ontario	Lakehead University	Honours Bachelor of Social Work (HBSW)	4 years
Ontario	Lakehead University	Honours Bachelor of Social Work (HBSW)	1 year
Ontario	Lakehead University	Master of Social Work (MSW)	2 years
Ontario	Laurentian University	Honours Bachelor of Indigenous Social Work (HBISW)	4 years
Ontario	Laurentian University	Honours Bachelor of Social Work (HBSW)	4 years
Ontario	Laurentian University	Master of Social Work (MSW)	1.5–2 years
Ontario	McMaster University	Honours Bachelor of Social Work (HBSW) [Minor option: Social Justice and Inclusive Communities]	3–4 years
Ontario	McMaster University	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) [General; Critical Practise in Child Welfare; Indigenous]	2+ years
Ontario	McMaster University	Master of Social Work Critical Analysis	1 year
Ontario	McMaster University	Master of Social Work Critical Leadership in Social Services and Communities	1 year

Location	Educational Institution	Program(s)	Duration of Program
Ontario	McMaster University	Ph.D in Social Work	6 years
Ontario	McMaster University	Graduate Diplomas: Critical Leadership in Social Services and Communities; Community–Engaged Research and Evaluation	1 year; 16 months
Ontario	Nipissing University	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)	4 years
Ontario	Renison Univeristy College (with University of Waterloo)	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)	10 months
Ontario	Renison Univeristy College (with University of Waterloo)	Master of Social Work (MSW)	1 year
Ontario	Toronto Metropolitan University	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)	4 years
Ontario	Toronto Metropolitan University	Master of Social Work (MSW)	1 year
Ontario	Trent University	Honours Bachelor of Social Work (HBSW)	4 years
Ontario	University of Toronto	Master of Social Work (MSW)	2 years
Ontario	University of Toronto	Ph.D in Social Work	4–5 years
Ontario	University of Windsor	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)	2–4 years
Ontario	University of Windsor	Master of Social Work (MSW)	1–2 years
Ontario	University of Windsor	Master of Social Work (MSW) / Juris Doctor	3 years
Ontario	University of Windsor	Ph.D in Social Work	2+ years
Ontario	Wilfrid Laurier University	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)	4 years
Ontario	Wilfrid Laurier University	Master of Social Work (MSW)	1–2 years
Ontario	Wilfrid Laurier University	Ph.D in Social Work	4+ years
Ontario	York University	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)	3 years
Ontario	York University	Master of Social Work (MSW)	1–2 years
Ontario	York University	Ph.D in Social Work	5 years
Québec	McGill University	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)	4 years
Québec	McGill University	Master of Social Work (MSW)	2 years
Québec	McGill University	Master of Science (Applied) in Couple and Family Therapy (joint Jewish General Hospital)	2–3 years
Québec	McGill University	PhD Program in Social Work (joint McGill/UdeM/UQAM)	5–7 years
Québec	Université de Moncton	Baccalauréat en travail social	3 ans
Québec	Université de Moncton	Baccalauréat en travail social (pour candidates ou candidats avec un baccalauréat connexe ou ayant une éxperience pertinente de travail)	2 ans
Québec	Université de Moncton	Maîtrise en travail social	2 ans
Québec	Université de Montréal	Baccalauréat en travail social	3 ans
Québec	Université de Montréal	Maîtrise en travail social	1.5–2 ans
Québec	Université de Montréal	Doctorat en travail social	3+ ans
Québec	Université de Sherbrooke	Certificat en travail social	dépend des étudiants
Québec	Université de Sherbrooke	Baccalauréat en service social	3 ans

Location	Educational Institution	Program(s)	Duration of Program
Québec	Université de Sherbrooke	Maîtrise en service social	dépend des étudiants
Québec	Université de Sherbrooke	Propédeutique en service social	1 an
Québec	Université de Saint-Boniface	Baccalauréat en travail social	4 ans
Québec	Université du Québec à Chicoutimi	Baccalauréat en travail socia	3 ans
Québec	Université du Québec à Chicoutimi	Certificat en: intervention communautaire; intervention jeunesse, ou toxicomanies et autres dépendances	1 an
Québec	Université du Québec à Chicoutimi	Propédeutique (Maîtrise en travail social)	1 an
Québec	Université du Québec à Montréal	Baccalauréat en travail social	3 ans
Québec	Université du Québec à Montréal	Maîtrise en travail social	2 ans
Québec	Université du Québec à Montréal	Doctorat en travail social	4 ans
Québec	Université du Québec en Abitibi – Témiscamingue	Bachelier en travail social	3 ans
Québec	Université du Québec en Abitibi – Témiscamingue	Maîtrise en travail social	4 ans
Québec	Université du Québec en Outaouais	Certificat en travail social	1 an
Québec	Université du Québec en Outaouais	Baccalauréat en travail social	3 ans
Québec	Université du Québec en Outaouais	Maîtrise en travail social	2 ans
Québec	Université du Québec a Rimouski	Baccalauréat en travail social	3 ans
Québec	Université du Québec a Rimouski	Certificats: psychoéducation, psychologie, santé mentale, trouble du spectre de l'autisme	1 an
Québec	Université du Québec a Rimouski	Maîtrise en travail social	2 ans
Québec	Université du Québec a Rimouski	Maîtrise en travail social (sur mesure)	2 ans
Québec	Université du Québec a Rimouski	Doctorat en travail social (sur mesure)	3 ans
Québec	Université Laval	Baccalauréat en travail social	3 ans
Québec	Université Laval	Maîtrise en travail social – avec mémoire	2 ans
Québec	Université Laval	Doctorat en travail social	4 ans
New Brunswick	St. Thomas University	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)	4 years
New Brunswick	St. Thomas University	Master of Social Work (MSW)	1 year
Nova Scotia	Dalhousie University	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)	2 years + 2 weeks
Nova Scotia	Dalhousie University	Master of Social Work (MSW)	1–2 years
Newfoundland and Labrador	Memorial University of Newfoundland	Bachelor of Social Work	2–4 years