Aboriginal social institutions especially for the remote and northern Aboriginal communities.

Impacts on Social Work Identity
The macro context of social services not only poses challenges to the social work sector identity but also to the emerging development of a distinct Aboriginal social work sector identity. Challenges of securing sustainable funding to social services remain questionable in the current climate of cost containment, fiscal cutbacks and lack of public support. The value of social programs is questioned and services are not clearly understood or valued.

Social issues and social work are at times perceived to be a low priority for both government and Aboriginal leaders. Funds allocated for social development are being used for other purposes, or misappropriated in a few of the Aboriginal communities. Political interference in the workplace, community politics and nepotism were other human resource issues that were perceived to negate the positive impacts of resource allocation.

There is a lack of recognition, respect and validation for the profession of social work and the role of Aboriginal social workers, even though they are making a difference in the communities they serve. In this environment, retention of workers is made more difficult. For example, pay levels may be less than in other more highly valued occupations, workloads may be higher, and other intangibles such as lower prestige or lack of regard from their own communities may act as a disincentive to recruitment. To exacerbate the situation, Aboriginal social workers are struggling to define their roles as helpers within the Aboriginal traditional and cultural context in an environment largely controlled outside of the Aboriginal influence. All of these human resource issues contribute to the lack of distinct identity of the social work profession.

5. Challenges in Human Resources, Training and Education

The human resource challenges, and responses to these pressures and demands will continue to escalate. One of the contentious human resource issues is the increased employment of Aboriginal social workers in mainstream institutions to respond to high unemployment rates and pressures for equity hiring. Aboriginal equity representation in the social work sector represents one of the challenging gaps to be addressed. Equity representation and the delivery of social services programming appear to be responsive to the Aboriginal client population. Statistics show that 4.6% of the social worker occupation workforce identified as being Aboriginal in comparison to 43% of the Canadian population that is Aboriginal. If statistics considered equity staff targets based on the percentage of Aboriginal social service cases or based employment targets as a rationale to better balance the supply and demand of Aboriginal social workers, the true nature of the gap in employment equity would become apparent.

Employment equity is under attack, and alternative options, which will achieve the goal of bridging the employment equity gap need to be implemented.

Labour Market Demands
Labour market demands for specialized skills from Aboriginal communities are and will continue to drive the preparation of social workers. Skills such as having the critical thinking and analytical knowledge of the macro context of Aboriginal social services are increasingly required. The number of Aboriginal people requiring counselling, treatment of primary and underlying problems, cases of serious and multiple intergenerational trauma, unresolved issues, and relationship counselling are increasing. Skilled therapists and private practitioners are required to meet this increasing market demand. Skilled social workers in the areas of management/administration, risk assessment, technological skills and specialized skills in child welfare, medical social workers, treatment specialists and the ability to work within a multidisciplinary approach to social work are some of the labour market demands identified. The demands for specialized skills, competencies, knowledge and expertise from the Aboriginal communities to fill labour demands are increasing.

The Employers' Perspective

Employers identified a mixture of skill gaps, personal capacities and working environment that shape the preparedness of new social work graduates. Most employers feel that new graduates have the necessary generalist skills, but require a great deal of in-service training and orientation. Graduates from schools of social work were perceived as meeting or exceeding general employment skills,
although schools of social work were encouraged to take more responsibility for students in their programs that were not suited for the social work profession.

Prospective employers in Aboriginal social institutions are demanding that employees be on a personal self-healing journey and cognition of the importance of examining the integration of the Aboriginal culture and traditions to promote individual, family and community wellness and healing. These knowledge-based skills were identified to address anti-oppression and deep-seated addictions common in most Aboriginal communities. Skills and competence to understand and incorporate the Aboriginal philosophies, values, elders’ knowledge in personal and professional practice were also identified. Knowing one’s own Aboriginal culture and identity was perceived as a very important component to community renewal initiatives. The skill gaps identified included the use of computer technology, administrative skills, policy development, written communication skills and self care for the helpers. Skill enhancement specialized skills to address new and emerging issues such as addressing clients with FAS/FAE, child welfare abuse cases and working in an interdisciplinary approach were identified by student graduates and social work practitioners.

The Perspective of Graduates
Graduates reported that in general their social work education prepared them well to succeed in the field of social work. Their field practicum experience was valuable as well as specific courses and their own life experiences. The social work programs and courses were perceived as beneficial, although traditional and cultural appropriateness and relevancy of course content were seen as gaps to be bridged.

The Response from Education and Training
The challenge facing universities and colleges offering social work programs to bridge the demands with educational training is considerable. Schools need to examine the means by which the generalist social work framework can offer specialization in areas such as counselling, administration, child welfare and specialization in FAS/FAE, addictions. If education is seen as a bridge between supply and demand, then that bridge must address the diverse issues, needs, expertise and competence required by the Aboriginal communities.

The educational and training responses in the preparation of student labour supply to meet current and future market demands are varied. Schools of social work are meeting the challenges in many different ways. There are positive trends towards increased collaboration between educational institutions, such as the university and community colleges that offer social work educational programs, and Aboriginal communities. Positive changes are occurring in social work education programs, advocacy for Aboriginal peoples, sending staff and students into Aboriginal agencies for training and practicum placement. The provision of distance education, recruitment of Aboriginal students and Aboriginal community-driven policies, trends and practices are slowly being incorporated into social work education courses. Training and Aboriginal representation on advisory boards for social work programs and having more specific and diverse Aboriginal Social Work courses in place were other trends noted.

Most of the universities and colleges social work education programs identify challenges with the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal faculty, and with the lack of resources with which to offer more community-based Aboriginal BSW programs. Strategies were recommended such as increasing the number of Aboriginal lecturers, Aboriginal resource people and elders in social work programs and the number of courses offered through distance education. The provision of more community-based educational programs was also identified as a way to ensure the successful recruitment and retention of Aboriginal BSW graduates within their own communities. This strategy is put forward despite the fact that most universities and colleges do not have the funding to cover the administrative and associated costs of mounting Aboriginal social work programs. Other strategies were given as measures to decrease the gaps in education. These strategies include advocating for student funding and eligibility requirements for student funding. They also include offering the diversity of specialized social work courses and integrated social work practice demanded by the Aboriginal communities to address community realities, cultures, work situations and to bridge these with social work theory and curriculum.
6. Certification

Certification and educational training were identified as necessary to improve the quality and standards of services and practice and as a regulatory aspect defining the social work profession. Most of the professional social work associations certify social workers and deliver continuing education and professional development. However, certification was also perceived in many different ways by Aboriginal social workers. Many of the Aboriginal social workers in mainstream institutions emphasize the benefits of certification, including increased incomes, upward mobility and access to training. Further benefits to certification included addressing the legal repercussions in social services, and gaining the credibility and validation that is acknowledged in the social work profession and workplace.

In addition, a large number of the Aboriginal social workers working at the community level indicated other criteria and priorities, which they indicated would improve the quality and standards of programs and services in the Aboriginal communities. These included qualities such as the worker's own wellness, life and employment experience, Aboriginal language fluency and knowledge and skills about one's own Aboriginal community. Certification under an Aboriginal social work association responsive to Aboriginal governments was also identified as being preferable to certification under mainstream social work associations. Certification under mainstream social work associations was at times perceived by Aboriginal social workers as an assimilationist tool to determine recognition of social workers solely based on mainstream educational criteria. The challenge to bridge this issue will be the willingness of mainstream social work associations to recognize Aboriginal social work associations that are responsive to their Aboriginal governments in the provinces and territories Aboriginal people occupy.

7. Conclusions

The impact of the macro context of social services is contributing to an increasing demand for programs and services at a time when the resource base for social spending is shrinking. The movement towards devolution of social programs and services to Aboriginal control and delivery has increased employment opportunities for social workers and driven demand for an increased supply of qualified and certified Aboriginal social workers. The quality and standards of social services are slowly improving as more qualified social workers take on the roles and responsibilities especially at the Aboriginal community level. There are also negative impacts relating to cost containment, fiscal cutbacks, increased accountability and demands for programs and services, education and training. These include the increased use of committed Aboriginal paraprofessional and qualified community social workers working without benefits, income levels, and job security. There are trends towards higher caseloads, dwindling resources and workplace dynamics that are creating enormous stresses and demands on the job. These workplace challenges make the retention and recruitment of qualified and certified social workers at the Aboriginal community level, especially in remote and northern Aboriginal communities, very difficult. They also contribute to high turnover of staff and employee burnout in the workplace.

In conclusion, the environment of social services and the social work profession is being affected in the following ways:

- There is increasing devaluation of social services as a whole characterized by a lack of resources and public support, the realization of funds earmarked for social spending, political interference and differential treatment, which contributes to the diffusion of the identity of the social work profession.

- There are increased demands for accountability by government resulting in increased requirements for post secondary degrees and certification. Resources to meet the labour market demands and conditions of the Aboriginal communities remain a significant challenge for education and training.

- Educational and training responses to meet the challenges are showing positive trends and changes in response to the Aboriginal communities. Demands for specific and diverse Aboriginal social work courses and programs, enhancement of Aboriginal faculty and mounting...
distance community-based social work programs are gaps that need to be bridged in education and training.

- Provision of professional development through associations of social work and on the job training remains questionable. While certification and educational training is strongly supported by the Aboriginal communities, the means by which certification is currently practiced, and the criteria for certification need to accommodate Aboriginal self-determination aspirations. Bridging this gap will enhance and address the quality and standards of social work and further define the social work profession.

II. Aboriginal Social Work Sector Study Strategic Plan

1. Introduction
This strategic directions report synthesizes the findings of the Aboriginal social work sector research to provide the rationale for the Aboriginal Social Work Sector Study Strategic Plan. The plan is categorized under three headings: Social Workers/People, Social and Economic Justice, and Public Awareness and Marketing.

2. Social Workers/People

GOAL:
To continue to support and enhance the inclusion and integration of Aboriginal traditional and cultural worldview, approaches, models of programs and services, practice and research

OBJECTIVES:
- To develop Aboriginal theoretical paradigms and models
- To establish social work programs and courses that reflect Aboriginal theoretical paradigms and models
- To enhance cultural awareness
- To develop and integrate Aboriginal human services research into policies and practices

The Aboriginal sector research indicates that Aboriginal theoretical paradigms and practice models are not in place, although there is movement towards the inclusion and integration of culture and traditions in Aboriginal social work theory and practice that reflects the diversity of Aboriginal cultures and traditions. This is slowly increasing across Canada, but needs to be comprehensively addressed. Not all models and theories work for Aboriginal people and models of most interest to Aboriginal agencies are ones that are adaptable to meet needs of clients.

Aboriginal social work is best described as interdisciplinary and involves working with the justice system, mental health services, hospitals, child welfare and psychiatry. The common vision of Aboriginal social work is one where the individual social worker has knowledge of a wide array of structural and environmental factors that affect the client. An Aboriginal social development model built on holistic community-based services, consensus decision making, elder participation, cultural and spiritual integration among other principles needs to be incorporated in social work practice, education, research and training.

- The use of Elders, cultural best practices, holistic integrated approaches and the incorporation of these into programs and services is slowly being implemented. These needs have to be supported and enhanced by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and communities. Aboriginal social workers must be taught about these critical and important issues, concerns and directions.

- More Aboriginal people, especially the younger generation, want to learn about their own Aboriginal ways of life, worldview, traditions and culture. There is a growing realization that Western socialization and education has not adequately met the needs of Aboriginal people, and in fact, in many ways, has contributed to Aboriginal peoples’ cultural shame, sense of inferiority, low self worth and identity crises. Thus, demands for more Aboriginal faculty and Aboriginal curriculum, and course content which addresses structural inequities, issues of de-colonization, internalized racism, community development, traditional and cultural approaches will continue.

- The demand for culturally relevant service delivery styles and distance education delivery promoting Aboriginal community-based education will continue to develop as a means
of addressing the social needs of remote aboriginal populations.

- More Aboriginal community-based educational/training opportunities are needed to complete university accredited social work programs. This training should be culturally relevant and reflect the realities of Aboriginal communities, expectations and visions. Training programs should also recognize prior experience and consideration should be given to fast-tracking Aboriginal social workers in social work education to meet the high demand.

As a result of Canadian assimilation policies in recent decades, the trend towards traditional and culturally appropriate services and programs sometimes creates conflicts between Christianity and traditional and cultural social service approaches and models, especially in northern Aboriginal communities where religious institutions had unfettered influence. Ways to mediate differences, promote tolerance, and examine common visions and goals need to be addressed. Aboriginal people need to become more aware of the historical context of colonization and assimilation to understand current situations, to understand “who they are” and to be able to reintegrate their identity with pride and dignity.

- The growth and emergence of Aboriginal traditional and cultural approaches is giving rise to issues of the validation and legitimization of Elders/Medicine/Spiritual people and their roles in social service delivery. Issues of accountability and conduct guidelines for this new sector are also moving to the forefront.

- Aboriginal spirituality has been exploited, taken out of context, and expropriated by experts, back to nature specialists, “hocus-pocus” medicine men, and sometimes abused by individual elders. This does more harm and damages the positive gains and benefits in the reintegration of traditional and cultural ways into service delivery. The legitimization of Elders and healers as integral to Aboriginal methodologies, with the implementation of accountability measures will significantly address these issues.

There has been an increased interest by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Aboriginal traditional and cultural spirituality. In the Aboriginal social services milieu, this has translated to the use of spiritual healing, traditional healers, and ceremonies and rituals in Aboriginal homes, communities, institutions and work places.

There is a high demand from both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal institutions for Aboriginal traditional and cultural knowledge, skills and expertise to improve self development, quality of life, empowerment, pride, and to promote humanism and healthy wellness and balance at the Aboriginal community level. Treatment programs utilizing traditional and cultural approaches as opposed to psychiatric, psychological and Western medical approaches are increasing. Many of the respondents indicated that there is generally a positive acceptance by mainstream agencies of the use of Aboriginal approaches and the use of Elders within institutions, particularly within the corrections system. The positive impacts have been noted especially in the trend towards using Aboriginal spirituality to help with alcohol and drug abuse and other social pathologies among the Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal women have been leaders in the healing and wellness initiatives. The majority of Aboriginal social workers are women. Mainstream institutions need to weigh, recognize and support traditional and cultural expertise, methods and approaches as much as mainstream approaches to programs and services that are accessed by many Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal spirituality is not perceived as a “cure-all,” but is effective in conjunction with mainstream treatment modalities and, thus, is viewed as a holistic integrated approach. This developing Aboriginal methodology is sometimes perceived to be in conflict with the rational, empirical mainstream practices, approaches and ideologies. Thus, the demand to provide Aboriginal cultural and traditional integrated approaches is, and will continue to be, challenged despite empirical evidence that these methodologies are effective with Aboriginal people. Therefore, the enhancement of skills, knowledge and expertise for Aboriginal people to provide cross-cultural education is required.
Resources to research Aboriginal traditional and cultural ways of addressing social issues, perspectives of social welfare, and Aboriginal versus Western values, i.e., collective vs. individual rights, needs to be developed and implemented.

The concept of the culture-based agency is the evolution of social service delivery, integrating Aboriginal cultural methods within the Aboriginal social work services. Aboriginal social workers in these agencies stress the significance of Aboriginal culture to promote individual, family and community healing and wellness. They indicated that it was imperative to include Aboriginal culture and traditions in all aspects of social work to address anti-oppressive issues, deep-seated addiction problems and, alternatively, to understand philosophies, cultural values, Elders’ knowledge, and the strengths inherent in the particular culture and traditions. This perspective is reflected in their practices and clients trust these social workers because of pride, strength, knowledge and skills that stem from their Aboriginal heritage.

In culture-based agencies, staff are prepared to deal with racially sensitive issues. Workers help clients deal with race/discrimination issues by validating concerns and helping clients’ “name” the issues. Aboriginal social workers are using their Aboriginal political and administrative structures to advocate on behalf of Aboriginal clients in urban centers. Most social workers view advocacy work as intrinsic to the work of a social worker in a culture-based agency. The philosophical approach incorporates change and the evolution of client needs into programs—programs are client-directed as dictated by needs. The approach to practice is described as an Aboriginal culture-based approach that is adaptable to the needs of the client, and, as a result, is interdisciplinary (justice, mental health, hospitals, child welfare, and psychiatry). Culture-based agencies tend to look at prospective employees holistically, i.e., education, personal healing path, their traditional and contemporary worldview, life history, knowledge of the specific job, their maturity, wisdom and intuitive abilities, as well as ability to look at issues in a holistic way within a structural context. Most employers are looking for employees with a BSW, child welfare experience, knowledge of Aboriginal culture, critical thinking and analytical skills, risk assessments, community planning and development expertise. Within these agencies, there is the strong commitment to the belief that Aboriginal social workers need to do their own healing while helping others.

The development of the culture-based agency appears to be a logical step in the evolution of Aboriginal social service delivery that seeks to integrate social service theories and practices with Aboriginal traditional and cultural perspectives. The fostering and support of development in the area of Aboriginal theory and practice development and the integration of these into the social services milieu is essential for cultural relevance and for what is proving to be effective best practices for Aboriginal people.

GOAL:
To provide social and educational programs and services which reflect the traditional and cultural diversity of Aboriginal populations

OBJECTIVES:
- To integrate Aboriginal practice into programs with priority given to children, youth, and urban centers
- To reflect the variations in content and practices
- To use Aboriginal community people to design and implement social and educational programs
- To study and research Aboriginal diversity

In the Aboriginal social work training sector, there is awareness that educational institutions do not provide enough programs on alternative theoretical paradigms of human services and human development. The lack of accreditation for culturally relevant social work training and community-based education for Aboriginal people is a significant gap in the training industry. Current programs are moving towards acknowledging and incorporating Aboriginal issues into curricula. Most social work faculty are strongly involved in community issues and use this knowledge to stay current in social work courses and instruction content. Most schools of social work are small and issues within faculty are perceived to be resolved quickly. Faculties of schools of social work conduct research on anti-racism and other social issues, and have initiated spiritual, ecological and international approaches.
to social work. In most social work education
centers, students have opportunities to voice
opinions and concerns and have input into course
content. Aboriginal students are consulted by
faculty for feedback on new ideas for course content,
and faculty share what they learn from students.
Schools are beginning to work with the Aboriginal
communities. Social work courses have expanded
to include core courses on Aboriginal people, and
critical issues such as alcohol/drug abuse and sexual
abuse.

Institutions reported anticipating changes based
on curriculum review processes, especially with
respect to multi-cultural, multi-racial and anti-racism
issues. For First Nations, there will be a stronger
emphasis on child welfare and a focus on increasing
the number of Aboriginal faculty and students,
and enhancing Aboriginal traditional and cultural
learning practices and models, such as a cultural
camp course. The future growth in the provision
of distance education for Aboriginal people will
also influence schools to develop programs that
are appropriate and relevant for remote and isolated
communities.

The Aboriginal population is a young population
with low educational levels, characterized by
high levels of alcohol, drug and substance abuse,
traumatic injuries and structural barriers
to success. These issues will continue to drive
demand for programs and services, especially in
urban areas where increased Aboriginal urbanization
is creating a new field for services. Social exclusion
and marginalization of this sector of the Aboriginal
population is perceived to be one of the priority
areas identified by many of the Aboriginal and non-
Aboriginal respondents. The demand for culturally
appropriate service delivery styles and education
delivery promoting Aboriginal community-based
education will also continue. Aboriginal people
are led into the field through personal experience.

Personal experiences with family dysfunction,
traumatic issues, racism, residential school survivor,
living off reserve and other life experiences influence
the choice of career. The desire to work specifically in
the Aboriginal social work services largely influence
the career choice of most Aboriginal social workers.
Primary career motivators include maintaining
connection to the Aboriginal community, supporting
agency cultural philosophies, an interest in cross-
cultural social work, access to challenging work,
opportunities to make changes in the system and to
address serious issues such as poverty.

Aboriginal student numbers are increasing and
there is a challenge delivering program and course
content effectively to such a diverse group. Another
challenge is meeting the mandate of a bicultural or
Aboriginal-focused curriculum while dealing with the
notion that to do so means lowering standards and
credibility in the field of social work. Balancing the
needs of the Aboriginal community and students by
offering a diversity of specialized social work courses
addressing addictions, grieving, suicide, etc., while
at the same time meeting the institutions' accreditation requirements is an important
challenge. In addition, there is a challenge to
recognizing and incorporating the unique practices
and beliefs of diverse Aboriginal nations into
educational programs.

First Nations and Aboriginal controlled social work
programs generally incorporate diverse Aboriginal
cultural issues and perspectives in most academic
components of the programs, including circle
formats in classes, a required 10-day cultural
camp social work course, and the use of Elders
as instructors in the classroom. Incorporating
traditional approaches such as traditional Aboriginal
counselling and community-based models into the
curriculum, and having diverse instructors in the
program were identified as important features.
The significance of culturally relevant training
cannot be understated. Most Aboriginal students
know and understand anti-oppression issues.
Aboriginal philosophies are different than those in
the mainstream. For example, the re-unification of
families is an important focus, as is proven sobriety
and life experience as criteria for training.

While mainstream programs provide space for
Aboriginal students and other diverse groups,
most programs do not adequately focus on
Aboriginal people by providing appropriate training,
skill development and cultural competency to work
in Aboriginal communities. However, there is a
commitment to gender, race, class and sexual
orientation diversity, as well as a commitment
to increasing Aboriginal content in courses.
Aboriginal and diversity issues are incorporated into
certain courses as a generalist approach to social work. Schools of social work education and training need to take advantage of Aboriginal education in initiatives such as sponsorship of designated seats or positions for Aboriginal students, by implementation of mentorship programs and improving existing Aboriginal student support systems while students are attaining training and/or education.

**GOAL:**
To strengthen capacity building through the provision of accredited community-based education and training of Aboriginal social workers

**OBJECTIVES:**
- To provide social work education and training with priority being given to remote and northern Aboriginal communities
- To attract, retain and increase Aboriginal social workers through continued education
- To address the challenges and emerging issues facing the Aboriginal sector
- To enhance credibility of Aboriginal social workers
- To keep family and community cultural integrity intact
- To build cohesiveness and community
- To improve effectiveness, cultural appropriateness and to save money

Within the Aboriginal sector, there is concern that ownership and control issues are directly related to capacity building, decision making capacity, effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance. Aboriginal respondents indicated that Aboriginal capacity building is being constrained by constitutional issues, competition over scarce resources, funding envelopes, perceived lack of public support for Aboriginal social issues and differing ideological perspectives. In some provinces, universities cannot find the funds from The Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (DIAND) to cover university and administrative costs associated with mounting an Aboriginal social work program. Some perceive the underlying intent to control, rather than to facilitate change in Aboriginal communities. Capacity building is limited by structural government policies, by procedures in the Aboriginal communities in the process of moving to regional authorities (i.e., tribal governments), and by decentralized service delivery (Aboriginal community level). Mainstream organizations in social services are reflective of this controlling phenomenon which has an impact on Aboriginal program development, policies, delivery standards, intervention strategies. As a result, social systems for Aboriginal people fall short of meeting needs of Aboriginal service recipients. Capacity building within Aboriginal organizations is further constrained by socio-demographic realities: poverty; underdevelopment; urban migration; high population growth rates; and other indicators common in most Aboriginal communities.

Building Aboriginal capacity is a critical priority. A critical mass has been reached in terms of demand for qualified social workers. While more Aboriginal social workers are graduating each year, the demand exceeds the supply, especially in terms of MSW and Ph.D. social workers, and specialists. The evolving political and social structures within the Aboriginal environment are creating significant needs that must be addressed. There is a need for increased funding for Aboriginal administration, research, training and education, and policy development with Aboriginal social services organizations. Building administrative capacity for Aboriginal institutions to facilitate Aboriginal management rather than non-Aboriginal managers in decision-making positions is critical. Aboriginal control of social programs and services is emerging and will be growing. This will strengthen trends towards accreditation of services, professional credentials of social workers, improved capacity building with better management practices such as evaluation and training.

- Increased demand for Aboriginal social workers in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal institutions will continue to escalate especially for specialized services and emerging special needs areas such as FAE/FAS, substance abuse, group counseling, youth services.
- Trends towards increased linkages and networking among Aboriginal social work and educational institutions regionally and nationally will increase demand and competition for
appropriate, relevant, community-based and controlled social work education and training.

- Aboriginal organizations and governments need to address issues of nepotism, political interference in social administrative matters, and misappropriation of fiscal resources earmarked for social programs and services. The demand for qualified, certified social workers with social administration and political advocacy skills will be required to set up organizational systems, separating the political from the administrative functions and enhancing the credibility of the sector.

- The supply of professional, culturally competent social workers to meet demands of Aboriginal communities is not being met. Thus many Aboriginal people without professional training and education are being considered social workers in many Aboriginal communities. The number of social workers working without an undergraduate degree increases in northern and remote Aboriginal communities. Local Aboriginal community people with little formal education but with some training in workshops and orientations are hired to work as social service workers in many Aboriginal communities.

- Demand for trained, accredited and qualified social workers for Aboriginal communities, culture-specific agencies, and education/training opportunities will increase as more Aboriginal communities secure funding resources and organize to have community-based social work education programs and services offered within their communities. Schools of Social Work are re-examining their roles and responsibilities towards evolving demand needs by Aboriginal population. The nature and process of incorporating Indigenous content and resource people are being recognized.

Many Aboriginal social workers working at the Aboriginal community level have their BSWs, but few have graduate degrees. The Aboriginal social work services is seeing a great increase in qualified applicants for all positions. It is getting easier to find qualified and professional aboriginal employees. However, it is difficult finding Aboriginal faculty members and attracting MSWs to universities and colleges. There are also difficulties in recruiting qualified Aboriginal students for BSW programs and reaching desired student enrollment quotas for Aboriginal people. Finding the resources for an Aboriginal MSW program is a challenge. Finding qualified Aboriginal people at Ph.D. level was perceived to be difficult. There are significant gaps in skilled management, computer literacy, and in specialized knowledge such as addressing FAS/FAE and the full range of mental health issues, networking, community resources, and in specialized areas such as child-play therapy. The recruitment and retention of qualified and professional Aboriginal social workers is a critical human resource issue. Funding is required for Aboriginal employment to address shortage of qualified BSW social workers in northern and remote Aboriginal communities.

Mainstream society and institutions must give the field of social work and the role of Aboriginal social workers recognition in practice. This translates to increased resources for more specialized training needed in alcohol prevention, youth services, counselling and interviewing skills, FAE/FAS, child abuse, sexual offenders, and mental health issues. The implications will be increased partnership with social work educational institutions in regard to the development of specialized courses and Aboriginal social work programs.

Despite the critical issues, Aboriginal social workers feel that they are making a difference in the field of social work. In Aboriginal social work educational institutions, in particular, there is a perception that relevant philosophy and approaches, distance education, Aboriginal control and delivery of program, and links and accountability between the institutions and the Aboriginal community are all contributing to the success and viability of Aboriginal social work education.

**GOAL:**

To support the ongoing professional development of social workers working with Aboriginal people and communities.
OBJECTIVES:
- To ensure availability of resources for continued education, workshops, conferences, orientations and training
- To promote training and continued professional development in specialized and traditional Aboriginal knowledge and ways

Tied closely to capacity building, is the need for professional development of Aboriginal social workers and social workers working with Aboriginal people and communities.

An increase in Aboriginal professionals in social program management level with increased politicization and Aboriginal consciousness will encourage mainstream social work institutions to be accountable and to advocate for change to address racism, critical structural changes and resources affecting Aboriginal people within the mainstream social systems. There is a concern that universities appear to be more interested in positioning themselves as Aboriginal centers of excellence to secure Aboriginal funding dollars than in providing accountable, relevant and appropriate Aboriginal research, and community-based education and training. On-going training for workers in case management that is committed to culture-based philosophy and the holistic approach to service delivery creates a significant challenge in Aboriginal social service delivery and education. Continuous learning occurs through specialized training available through workshops and education. Culture based agencies adhere to strong policies with regard to continued education, educational leaves and mental health days off available to employees. Most respondents to the study indicated plans to further their education as part of their career strategy to improve on innovative and productive organizations, keep families together and educate their own people. Professional development is needed in the area of Aboriginal management, where issues are related to liability, practice guidelines, ethics, record keeping, improved case management and program coordination.

- In the movement to professionalize the social work profession, most provinces/territories require social workers to be registered with professional associations of social workers. Most Aboriginal social workers do not register nor do they appear to prioritize this move. The reasons include lack of need, additional costs, questionable relevance of the accreditation body, and jurisdictional issues that affect self-government aspirations.

GOAL:
To provide awareness of the political, ethnic and historical uniqueness and to articulate and communicate the means to address the unique positions of First Nation, Metis, and Inuit peoples at the local and national levels

OBJECTIVES:
- To advocate for structural and systemic change reflecting the unique positions of Aboriginal people
- To provide forums for cross-cultural education of diverse Aboriginal issues
- To assess professional practices to ensure compliance with directions of Aboriginal governments
- To collaborate and establish partnerships
- To ensure bicultural realities (Aboriginal/Canadian) as a way of life

Awareness of the unique social, legal and political environment in which Aboriginal people live is needed in order to establish effective collaborations with the mainstream social services sector and redress issues of systemic and structural barriers that hamper changes. The critical socio-demographic issues facing Aboriginal people must be acknowledged and supported by the mainstream social work sector.

Issues of institutional racism inherent in mainstream non-Aboriginal institutions such as the justice system and social service agencies present challenges. These challenges include acquiring resources to provide cross-cultural education, and advocating for changes to provincial standards, regulations and guidelines that do not reflect Aboriginal values and culture, and asking to be treated with the same credibility as mainstream social services institutions.

For individual Aboriginal social workers, the challenges are enormous. These include stress and burnout, huge caseloads, risk of vicarious trauma,
working in home communities, and educating non-Aboriginal communities with respect to the Aboriginal worldview and Aboriginal approaches to practice. Caseloads are unrealistic and increasing, and there is a perception that Aboriginal social workers are given higher caseloads than their non-Aboriginal counterparts in mainstream institutions. Child welfare becomes task-oriented; time spent on administrative tasks takes away from the people orientation. There is not enough time in a day to get everything done. Working in child welfare is difficult. The system is unable to support the demand. Caseloads are huge due to large catchment areas, and there are fewer resources than in the past to address the backlog of intergenerational problems and Aboriginal populations in urban centres.

The result is a job orientation that is increasingly crisis-oriented rather than oriented to the development of alternative supports and prevention strategies. For the Aboriginal worker, working in one's home reserve community as a social worker creates stress and feelings of isolation. These stressors were identified as office politics, community divisions, administrative funding "skimmed up" by band administration, the separation of the political from the administrative functions of the Aboriginal community, the education of people and community, and the task of apprehending children. Workers cannot have a lot of close, trusted friends when working in very small, tight-knit communities. Clients may be relatives, which presents an ethical challenge. Workers feel as if they are always working and dealing with very powerful issues that sometimes have personal implications.

- Aboriginal peoples' residual intergenerational trauma or legacy issues associated with trauma experienced in residential schools, foster care/adoptive homes, adult survivors of childhood sexual, physical, psychological abuse, neglect, systematic oppression and identity issues continue to be considered primary underlying psychological factors to be addressed. Intergenerational trauma relates to issues of family violence, community factionalism, suicide, and violent and accidental deaths. Each of these factors affect the safety, esteem, intimacy and interpersonal relationships felt by Aboriginal people and by sectors of social services. There is a perception that the system is shifting to community-based approaches that address these needs, especially in areas of Aboriginal healing and wellness initiatives, but not enough to affect the provision of mental health services and after care and support for further treatment, and post-secondary training and education.

- Aboriginal delivery of programs and services is moving from addressing the symptoms of Aboriginal social concerns towards addressing underlying psychological and social issues for the long term. Treatments for intergenerational trauma such as sexual abuse, abandonment, disenfranchisement, loss and grief associated with loss, cultural shame, and racism will increase demand for appropriate, relevant Aboriginal models of healing and wellness, assessment tools and appropriate clinical strategies by bicultural competent professionals.

- Social policy at the Aboriginal community level is beginning to shift to an integrated social development model of social welfare. Programs and services such as Aboriginal education, health and social programs, and justice are working together out of necessity. This will have an impact on mainstream social policy and approaches.

Within the Aboriginal sector, there is significant community collaboration in the areas of practicum placements such as First Nations Child and Family Services and, especially in research collaboration which it is believed should be developed involving the grassroots Aboriginal community. There is also good collaboration in terms of advocacy and having Aboriginal representation on advisory boards for social work programs. Institutions are linked with Aboriginal community agencies and government departments serving a significant proportion of Aboriginal people.

The role of the Aboriginal community is an important one, but challenging to define. Historically, limited access to training limits input capability but this is slowly changing. Historically, universities excluded Aboriginal people by academic credentials and not enough resources being put into the area of
increasing community consultation. Universities and colleges are increasingly being responsive to the Aboriginal communities in ways such as sending staff for training and practicum placements, cultural based education, distance education and community driven policies, and trends that are being incorporated into social work education and training. Universities are offering more First Nation issue courses and have individuals responsible for recruiting Aboriginal students through outreach. The structural limitations to Aboriginal involvement in social work education include the lack of Aboriginal faculty and faculty who are competent in Aboriginal issues, a lack of fiscal resources to offer community-based Aboriginal BSW programs and courses, and provide access to degree completion and recruitment of Aboriginal students. The institutional linkages may, in future, provide an important avenue for cross-cultural training. Education and training of non-Aboriginal professionals to understand Aboriginal culture, community realities, healing and wellness and bridging these realities with social work theory and curricula is critical.

GOAL:
To enhance capacity building within the Aboriginal populations to address external and internal marginalization and social and economic exclusion

EXTERNAL OBJECTIVES:
- To generate dialogue about and for sound solutions to the issues of resource sharing, control and power shifts
- To establish policy changes reflecting Aboriginal self-government
- To support justice decisions ruling in favour of Aboriginal rights

INTERNAL OBJECTIVES:
- To provide increased accountability for social programs and services
- To support the professional accountability of social work

3. Social and Economic Justice
Extremely high poverty and unemployment rates, critical housing shortages, and a lack of human and fiscal resources to meet basic services needs of Aboriginal people characterize the current fiscal and economic environment for most Aboriginal people. Devolution and transfer agreements to Aboriginal people are often perceived as being motivated primarily by cost containment, federal to provincial government off loading, political expediency, and “business as usual” with Aboriginal people, i.e. as window dressing with politically correct terminology. In reality, Aboriginal people perceive being marginalized by existing mainstream systems. Regional differences in the development in the Aboriginal sector vary with provincial/territorial government policies, percentage of Aboriginal people and other variables. In some provinces gradual reduction of fiscal capacity has contributed to increased funding cuts for smaller agencies, narrowed access to services, and contributed to social work overloads, weakened resources and options available to Aboriginal families, thus making worse an already critical environment.

As stated, capacity building within Aboriginal organizations is constrained by socio-demographic realities: poverty; underdevelopment; urban migration; population growth rates; and other indicators in Aboriginal communities. These economic adjustments are not always considered in cases of common, shifting migration and mobility of Aboriginal people entering and exiting reserves. Respondents perceive that there is less tolerance towards Aboriginal peoples’ struggles for increased self-determination by the general public. Gains and concessions achieved by Aboriginal people are perceived to be a net loss to the non-Aboriginal public in terms of higher taxes, loss of benefits, and tightened upward social mobility. This will impact political and governmental strategies in social programming and policies in such ways as tightened social controls, increased accountability, and in the monitoring of social services including Aboriginal organizations. These policies and strategies are considered reflective of an oppressive, colonized system, which perpetuates racism and discrimination among non-Aboriginal social workers.

- “Partnerships”; “joint initiatives” and associated jargon used in mainstream political, government and senior management institutional levels have amounted to little action, and practice at the Aboriginal community level. Gaps between ideology, perceived movements and practices at community level would have to be bridged.
The type of Aboriginal self-government that is evolving is perceived as a critical survival issue. Models of self-government that recognize Aboriginal jurisdiction are desired by Aboriginal people as opposed to provincial/territorial delegated authority or decentralized administrative models.

- Improved and enhanced coordination of programs and services within Aboriginal communities extend to organizational lines of authority, mandated services and the law, policies and procedures. Support for federal programming and improved relationships are contributing to better cooperation, although there is a perception of having to "prove Aboriginal capacity."

- There is a trend towards a broader definition of social work that is more holistic and promotes community development approaches. Integration and amalgamation of services at the Aboriginal community level is emerging. Professional health, social and education human service workers are increasingly working together in team-based approaches.

- Urban Aboriginal control of social programs and services is emerging and will be growing. This will strengthen trends towards accreditation of services, professional credentials of social workers, improving capacity building with better management practices such as evaluation, training, and accountability.

- An increase in Aboriginal professionals in social program management levels with increased politicization and Aboriginal consciousness will hold mainstream social work institutions accountable and advocate for change to address racism, demand for critical structural changes, resources, and priorities within mainstream social systems. The need to address Aboriginal management issues related to liability, practice guidelines, ethics, record keeping, improved case management, program coordination, accountability, and effective planning were identified.

**GOAL:**

To achieve parity for new and existing Aboriginal programs and services

**OBJECTIVES:**

- To promote social justice
- To address gaps between mainstream and Aboriginal social programs
- To allocate core funding for all Aboriginal programs and services
- To address the urban specific and changing socio-demographic needs of Aboriginal people and the Aboriginal social work services

Federal and provincial governments, while promoting Aboriginal self-government, have not significantly increased the resources to meet current and emerging needs of the Aboriginal communities. Funding to cover legal issues, litigation against Aboriginal social institutions, and resources to meet needs are not being addressed. The lack of core funding of urban and rural Aboriginal programs or the lack of compatible funding to deliver equivalent programs and services that exist in mainstream institutions is a major challenge. Funding of these types of social services is usually based on areas that are brought to public attention annually, while the financial accountability to the different funders creates administrative "nightmares." Hence programs will get started only to face annual funding policy changes. It also impacts on the development of consistent service delivery. Delivery and provision of a full range of social services to First Nations' communities with limited funding and under provincial laws, funding criteria, standards, mandates and governance is perceived as a major challenge for Aboriginal social service agencies under First Nations self-governments.

- Funding caps and limited funding imposed by the Federal government limit expansion into new and emerging areas such as the disabled, aging, FAS/FAE and urban homelessness. These are areas that are disproportionately represented by Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people need to acquire funding for special programs to address these new and emerging Aboriginal social issues.

- Growing disparity and gaps between mainstream provincial/territorial government programs and services and Aboriginal programs

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**FINDINGS OF SECTOR STUDY**

This is not a stand-alone document, please refer to the Canada-wide report for more Human Resources information.
and services, especially in northern and remote Aboriginal communities is a result of high costs of living, social isolation and few northern isolation benefits. Thus it is hard to find social workers and retain them for the long term within the isolated, impoverished pockets of northern and remote Aboriginal communities. A sense of alienation and non-acceptance from non-Aboriginal professionals and mainstream approaches within the northern and remote Aboriginal communities is perceived.

- An economic climate of high poverty, housing shortages, high unemployment levels and social conditions (e.g. low literacy rates, high cost of education, and psychosocial inter-generational impacts of colonization, etc.) will continue to drive the demand for social services. The Aboriginal communities will continue to force Aboriginal people to access social services especially in urban areas in disproportionate numbers, while the supply of resources for social services will remain the same.

- Sustained development and expansion of Aboriginal programs and services remain questionable in the face of cost containment, fiscal cutbacks and the current climate of social programs.

- Aboriginal clients and consumers of social services are increasingly more aware of their rights and demanding equity, parity and social justice. Aboriginal social workers with increased knowledge, and the expertise to facilitate changes within Aboriginal communities will also continue to press for massive changes within existing social programs and services.

Federal and provincial/territorial government cost containment, funding caps, and lack of funding significantly impact on all areas of life for Aboriginal people. Aboriginal program funding is short term, incremental and “as it becomes available” rather than long term, sustainable core funding. Federal and provincial governments do not appear to be committed for the long term, ‘catch-up’, sustainable, integrated and holistic approaches that are required to promote Aboriginal self determination (accessing, developing, delivering and capacity building).

This increases the already stressful and critical environment of Aboriginal communities. The trend toward the non-Aboriginal public neo-conservative ideology of “blaming the victim” and a hardening of attitudes towards Aboriginal people and their demands for equality, justice and rights will limit social progress in all areas. A punitive approach to service delivery translates into practices that monitor and control Aboriginal social services and will continue to offset opportunities.

- The trends towards increased Aboriginal control and devolution and attention to multiculturalism have helped delivery. At the micro-level, there have been solid developments in all areas of social services such as child welfare, flexibility of service delivery for Aboriginal communities, increased accountability and culturally appropriate social work.

GOAL:

To develop specialist training within the generalist social work education in schools of social work

OBJECTIVES:

- To establish specialist courses (i.e. multi-dysfunction, FAS, trauma) and study within the four year social work programs
- To explore the redistribution of arts/science and social work core and elective courses
- To emphasize practice specialties
- To require the completions of BA degrees majoring in Aboriginal studies

As outlined, there is a critical shortage of Aboriginal professionals who are specialists in certain sectors such as justice/corrections, mental health, and children’s services.

Specialists generate more programs in urban areas that the community-based social workers need to duplicate and may not have the skill level to do. As a result, there are more Aboriginal BSW generalists, but they are pressured to keep up with all specialized areas of the social work field. Among the rapidly evolving specialist areas in the Aboriginal social work sector are:

- FAS/FAE
- Crisis intervention (extreme violence)
- Fairly serious mental health issues
• Demand increasing in the area of sexual abuse, sex offender treatment
• Serious social and client problems (drugs, alcohol abuse, sexual abuse, child abuse, unemployment issues)
• Demographically, Aboriginal population growth rates and urban migration creating a crisis in meeting needs

Addressing these areas will require the development of specialist courses and training at the bachelor's and graduate levels. Continuing education programming will need to reflect these requirements. The Aboriginal social work sector will need to examine the feasibility of developing specialist bachelor's programs to deal with some of the overwhelming issues. For example, there is an extremely high demand for qualified counsellors and therapists to deal with the legacy of the residential school system and intergenerational abuse issues. Culture-based agencies tend to look at prospective employees holistically such as education, personal healing path, their traditional and contemporary worldview, life history, knowledge of the specific job, their maturity, wisdom, and intuitive abilities and the ability to look at issues in a holistic way within a structural context. They look for graduates to be skilled in all these areas and Aboriginal-training institutes will need to examine incorporating a Native Studies degree as a prerequisite or corequisite to a BSW.

• Lobbying for federal funding for universities and colleges to develop and offer Aboriginal BSW program/course specialities is necessary.

• Aboriginal social work institutions are stretching inadequate resources to the limit in offering community-based education initiatives and not meeting the demand.

GOAL:
To enhance self-care of social workers

OBJECTIVES:
• To build the issues of self-care into the social work curriculum
• To integrate culturally appropriate traditional self-care practices and services into the workplace, workplans, and practices (day to day, supervision, management)
• To enhance network building and mentoring in the workplace

Workers often deal with very powerful issues that sometimes have personal implications. The need to look at issues of self-care, vicarious trauma and examining effective workable solutions is crucial.

The major employment challenges that impact issues of self-care in the Aboriginal social work environment are:

• Multiple relationships with clients at the Aboriginal community level (relatives)
• Maintaining a life after work in an Aboriginal community is difficult. Being associated as a social worker can make it difficult to have other kinds of relationships with other people in a small community (friendships)
• Terrible and violent events that occur in Aboriginal communities affect some social workers personally
• High and serious caseloads
• Safety and security at the Aboriginal community level is a minor concern

Remedial action might include educational workshops for staff and foster parents in urban centers and further education of social workers to address all the diverse issues faced at the community level. While the sector is starting to address issues of self-care and the importance of support systems, this area needs to be developed, enhanced, and made culturally relevant to deal with the Aboriginal-specific issues outlined. Currently, the use of Elders to provide traditional and cultural support services for Aboriginal social services providers with other community human service providers is in place in some agencies. Aboriginal social workers receive informal emotional, mental and spiritual support from employers, elders, family and community members. Formal support was felt at times to be minimal.

Management behavior such as maintaining and supporting caring, respectful services to all people in an equitable manner is important. Supports are
incorporated into the culture-based agency policy through cultural leaves of absence, holidays, employment assistance plans (EAP) and access to cultural ceremonies.

In some provinces, however, Aboriginal workers feel that there are no structures in place to support them and enhance their ability to work in a culturally appropriate way. In other provinces, there is a perception that structural supports for Aboriginal oriented service delivery within the government structures are just starting to be initiated (i.e. Aboriginal units have been created and Aboriginal social workers are exerting some power in the decision-making structures at the administrative and management levels).

GOAL:
To provide for increased resources to improve technological capacities, competence, and technological accessibility by Aboriginal communities

OBJECTIVES:
• To ensure adequate resources for Aboriginal social work programs to access computers and computer skills
• To support data base development
• To incorporate use of technology into research capacity and develop internet, email access

Increasing and enhanced use of technology in Aboriginal communities presents both opportunities and threats:
• Evolving opportunities and desire for increased uses of technology are increasing in Aboriginal communities. Development of peer network and support systems through Internet (e.g. e-mail, list services) increases the efficiency and accessibility of communication and information. Computers are increasingly used as a program management tool (i.e. evaluation, case management, and assessment) and for social assistance programs. Control over payments, legitimized financial services and research are other areas being affected. For the most part, it will take a significant amount of time, resources and education and skill development before technology will play a significant part in service delivery in most Aboriginal communities.
• Social work education and training will be required to offer the use of technology in human services.
• Threats in the use of technology relate mainly to accessibility of information with regard to Aboriginal people by mainstream government institutions. Most of the Aboriginal respondents raised concerns related to loss of access, no control of information systems, security and confidentiality issues related to technology. It raises the underlying issues of who controls the information and how information is used. On the other hand, most non-Aboriginal respondents perceived technological opportunities related to policy and planning, assessment, cost saving and other positive impacts of technology.
• Technology through computer networking, program management, and personal use has not been significant in many of the northern and remote Aboriginal communities because most Aboriginal social service agencies cannot afford the high cost of proper technical equipment, training and maintenance. The high financial costs of technology especially in remote and northern Aboriginal communities are creating gaps related to technological use by social services agencies. In some cases, information technology results in providing instant, accessible information, and resources and work being done quickly and efficiently. In other cases, technology is perceived as a liability (i.e. duplication of work done manually). In some Aboriginal communities, language barriers, educational limitations, and abuses by service providers impede the use of technology.
• Technology continues to play a significant role in some Aboriginal communities through teleconferencing, distance education and other initiatives, but it cannot replace the human interaction that is critical in social work practice.
• Some Aboriginal agencies are working on computer programming, establishing networks and use of computers for presentations. This will increase demand for more computer literacy and training and the use of technology to advance self-determination for Aboriginal people.
4. Public Awareness and Marketing

GOAL:
To increase public awareness about racism and Aboriginal concerns

OBJECTIVES:
- To examine issues of systemic racism inherent in social work, and its impacts on Aboriginal people
- To examine issues of discrimination, racial attitudes and stereotypes and Aboriginal people
- To explore the impacts of racism in policies, priority setting, allocation of resources, and among Aboriginal people
- To critically analyze social programs and underlying ideological perspectives

Aboriginal communities represent one of the most challenging environments for social services yet they are poorly funded, and supports from mainstream counterparts are minimal. Dealing with other professionals who do not recognize the validity of the Aboriginal worldview exacerbates the challenge. Workers often have to play the role of educators with non-Aboriginals in different disciplines to teach the Aboriginal worldview and approaches, as well as justify those methods. Collaboration needs to be enhanced.

Systemic racism is a common theme reflected by the Aboriginal respondents in the Aboriginal sector study. Inequality, disparities, gaps in the scope and range and level of funding for programs and services for Aboriginal people in comparison to non-Aboriginal institutions were emphasized. Most Aboriginal respondents felt that little has changed structurally in social services at the macro-level to allow for changes that reflect the realities of Aboriginal people and communities. Extremely high poverty and unemployment rates, critical housing shortages, lack of human and fiscal resources to meet basic services needs of Aboriginal people characterize the current fiscal/economic environment for most Aboriginal people. Exploding population growth rates (especially among youth and elderly), a "century of Aboriginal neglect," the lack of social infrastructures, and emerging social, and health issues such as HIV/AIDS, FAE/FAS are compounding the problems and issues faced by the Aboriginal social work sector. High numbers of single and teen parents, urban homeless, gambling addictions and lack of resources, combined with a low level of commitment to social change for Aboriginal people are exacerbating the critical environment in most Aboriginal communities. In the Aboriginal social work profession, key issues include under-funding, oppression and racism, and Aboriginal awareness implementation in government agencies and institutions.

The Aboriginal sectors reported a sense that there is less tolerance towards Aboriginal peoples' struggles for increased self-determination by the general public. Gains and concessions achieved by Aboriginal people are perceived to be a net loss to the non-Aboriginal public in terms of higher taxes, loss of benefits, tightened social upward mobility. This will impact political and governmental strategies in social programming and policies such as to tightened social controls, increased accountability, monitoring of social services including Aboriginal organizations. These policies and strategies are considered reflective of an oppressive, colonized system, which perpetuate racism and discrimination among non-Aboriginal social workers. Federal and provincial governments appear to be noncommittal about the long term, "catch-up," and sustainable, integrated and holistic approaches required to promote Aboriginal self determination (accessing, developing, delivering and capacity building). This increases the already stressful and critical environment of Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal communities represent one of the most challenging environments for social services. Yet non-Aboriginal social workers and social work institutions are increasingly less critical of a mainstream system that funds and hires them. Silencing will impede changes towards Aboriginal capacity building and self-governance. There is a need for stronger advocacy for awareness and development of alternative solutions, strategies to access and to have a system responsive to the needs, issues and approaches of the Aboriginal people.

- Aboriginal clients and consumers of social services are increasingly more aware of their
rights and demanding equity, parity and social justice. Aboriginal social workers with increased knowledge, and the expertise to facilitate changes within Aboriginal communities will also continue to press for massive changes within existing social programs and services.

**GOAL:**

To support the self-determination of Aboriginal people

**OBJECTIVES:**

- To address outstanding jurisdictional issues of Aboriginal people
- To address the structural inequalities contributing to high rates of unemployment, poverty, crisis housing shortages, health problems of Aboriginal people
- To increase the autonomy of Aboriginal people
- To redress the impacts of colonization and structural racism
- To advocate for alternative options to the existing framework promoting the assimilation of Aboriginal people

Aboriginal self-government and increased jurisdictional recognition by Aboriginal people will challenge the current unequal partnership arrangements and agreements between provincial, territorial and Aboriginal governments. This will challenge both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal institutions to accomplish equal partnerships in coordinated, integrative and consultative approaches. This will also drive demand for employment, scope and range of programs and services, training, and raised community expectations.

There are trends towards Aboriginal control through self-government, development of Aboriginal models, institution of government-to-government relationships, creation of partnership agreements, and decentralization of Aboriginal programs and services to Aboriginal people in both rural Aboriginal communities and urban areas. All of these developments and initiatives are having significant impacts on the development of social policy, program design, standards, programming, and legal representation for Aboriginal people and trained Aboriginal social workers and managers.

New Aboriginal models, best practices, and shifts and changes will positively affect both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social programs. Flexibility and creativity must be foremost in seeking solutions for equal partnership.

However, as previously stated, the movement towards increased Aboriginal control and autonomy of Aboriginal programs and services is critically curtailed by constitutional and jurisdictional issues that affect policy, standards, priorities and other issues at the Aboriginal community level. The existing framework of provincial/territorial jurisdiction, legislation through the tripartite/double bilateral agreements, and delegated authority give unequal weight, authority, power and control over Aboriginal institutions to federal and provincial governments.

Aboriginal respondents largely perceive mainstream social service institutions as paternalistic decision-making institutions promoting assimilationist approaches towards Aboriginal governance and self-government. Many of the respondents indicated that the current climate of Aboriginal social welfare is undermining Aboriginal self-determination because accountability, ownership, priorities, shifts from the residual model of social welfare, resource allocation and other government initiatives are outside the control and governance of Aboriginal communities. This reality contributes to the marginalization of Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal respondents voiced the need to expand from the existing models of Indian Child and Family Services agreements (tripartite/double bilateral models) into models that allow for Aboriginal jurisdiction. This initiative was felt to be critical in changing the existing unequal power relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

- Ownership and control issues are directly related to capacity building, to improving decision-making capacity, effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance. Most of the Aboriginal respondents indicated that Aboriginal capacity building is being constrained by constitutional issues, competition over scarce resources, funding envelopes, perceived public lack of support for Aboriginal social issues, and differing ideological perspectives. Some of the Aboriginal respondents believe that the mainstream
perspective prevails, and that the intent is to control rather than facilitate change in Aboriginal communities. Mainstream social services organizations are reflective of this controlling phenomenon which is impacting on program development, policies, delivery standards, intervention strategies. As a result, social systems for Aboriginal people fall short of meeting needs of Aboriginal service recipients.

- Aboriginal communities require additional funding to support developments in management and Aboriginal laws and policies, and to address accountability, self governance and effective/efficient controls, while having the discretion of using provincial/territorial policies where applicable.
Conclusions to the Study:

Human Resources in Social Work and the Social Services Sector—Prospects and Challenges for the Future

To say that social work and social services are undergoing a time of dramatic change is to understate the case. These changes play out in many areas, but this study has been about how these changes affect the human resources environment in the social services sector.

The social services sector is at the nexus of two opposing forces—an increase in the scope and intensity of service needs and an ever-shrinking resource base for those they serve. The structure of service delivery is undergoing radical alteration, as the traditional primary service source, the public sector, devolves by contracting for services with private and/or not-for-profit organizations. Within organizations there are structural changes, with another set of opposing trends. That is, at the same time that standards are raised for the certification and accreditation of workers there is a concurrent, contradictory trend toward increased use of other professionals or even non-social service workers in "allied" fields for positions once held by social workers as a professional group. Decreasing job security, loss of autonomy in the name of multidisciplinarity, lack of support for the stresses and demands of the job all contribute to a negative synergy in the workplace.

Part and parcel of this dynamic tension is the continued diffusion of the identity of the social work profession itself, and a perceived concomitant devaluation of social services as a whole. The widely reflected need to develop a coherent, clearly defined professional identity is seen as a crucial building block for strengthening the position of the social service sector as a whole.

The devaluation of social work and social services arises from, and is reinforced by, value changes in the larger society. The poor and those working with and for them share a diminution of respect and a struggle to make their needs and their value known and accepted.

In the face of this concatenation of change and its often daunting impacts, the labour market statistics show that in sheer employment terms, the social services are a relatively good place to be, if unemployment rates alone are considered. There was strong employment growth for much of the 1990s. The social services labour force also has one
of the lowest unemployment rates of any sector in the country. However, earnings are lower than in many other professional fields. There is more to working than these basic numbers, and one of the strongest themes of the research is the on-the-job stress reported by the full range of respondents. Increased workloads, having to do more with less, and service users who are experiencing more intense, multi-dimensional challenges to their social, psychological and economic survival—all contribute significantly to making social service employment both extremely demanding and sometimes very dispiriting.

Returning to the statistics, however, in spite of the overall positive growth for the social services sector as a whole, employment trends within the labour force bear serious consideration. These trends must be taken into account by employers, educators, policy makers, and current and future workers in the sector as a whole.

A. Looking Ahead at Demand: Employment Prospects in Social Work and Social Services

In assessing employment prospects for the future, the research identified three main factors that are shaping and will continue to shape the social service labour force. Population growth, as well as related factors such as the economic status of certain population segments, is a key factor in estimating demand or employment for social workers and other occupations involved in the delivery of social services programming. Population size and the rate of population growth, age structure and how this is changing overall and for special groups are all-important factors to take into account in human resources planning. Government policies related to support for those in most need and those who work with and for them also have a significant impact on needs for social programming. Another closely related determinant of employment prospects is re-structuring of the sector and of related ones (such as health care). An important element of that re-structuring is the evolution of definitional boundaries of what constitutes a social services occupation—what it is and who does it.

1. Demographics and Socio-economic Aspects of Demand

The analysis of the demographic and the socio-economic environment for the social services sector identified several key changes that will have an impact on the demand for social services and, in turn, on employment over the coming decade.

- The rate of population growth is expected to slow over the coming decade. By itself, this slowing growth rate would suggest lower growth in employment in social services delivery.

- Children and youth services comprise a large component of current social services delivery. Looking ahead we see that there are significant changes in the age structure of the population, with the share of children and young persons declining. At first reading, this change would also suggest that demand for child-oriented social programming will fall somewhat.

- However many economic and social problems that are linked to dependence on social services are not declining but are, in fact, slowly increasing for many families. Young families have lost ground in terms of income from employment. Poverty remains a serious concern for many individuals and groups in society. Family structures are continuing to change to emphasize less permanent relationships and
single parent headed families are more frequent. Female single parent headed families are very likely to be below the low-income level, leaving many children in poverty. While the overall population growth slows, these trends are expected to keep increasing the demand for social services programming.

- A further significant indicator of increasing demand is faster than average growth of the Aboriginal population. For a wide variety of economic and social reasons, including a greater likelihood of being in low income groups, Aboriginal children and youth make up a disproportionate share of clients and cases. The Aboriginal population is growing rapidly, especially in the prairie and western provinces and in the north, and being far younger than the overall Canadian population and the number of Aboriginal children and youth is increasing. This, in the context of the continuing socio-economic gap for Aboriginal families and children, can only lead to increasing demands for services. Other demographic or socio-economic factors also point to increasing demand for social services programming over the coming decade.

- Immigration continues to add a sizeable number to the population; settlement is increasingly a concern and refugee flows continue. When immigration is combined with the share of the population numbers that are visible minority groups, Ontario, BC, Quebec, and Alberta are substantially affected by these demands.

- The growing Aboriginal population has many needs beyond the child care issue. Disproportionate numbers of Aboriginal peoples are in poverty, have low employment, are incarcerated or otherwise involved in the justice system or have health and disability problems.

- The growth of the population over 65 years of age, and especially of those over 75 years of age, is going to be substantial in the coming decades. While less likely than previous generations to be in poverty, many will not have family support in their community and so they will place new demands on social services. Homelessness has been increasing, despite a general economic recovery. Many of the homeless have other economic, social, and psychological problems.

2. Policy and Demand

Of equal importance for the sector as the impacts of these demographic changes, policy is also crucial in setting out how social services needs will be met. Policies can be over-riding, as in setting budget commitments, or can relate to how services are being delivered. Both have an impact on employment in the field.

- The latter half of the 1990s saw a decline in social services funding in most jurisdictions. Employment of social workers is expected to have levelled off, and perhaps even declined a little through 1999. However, by 1999/2000 there has been some easing of constraint and increasingly there is discussion of using budget surpluses for new programming. While budgets are not expected to increase dramatically, the budget declines should be over. This will allow for there to be some employment growth to meet expanding needs.

- Despite budget constraints, delivery of services by fully accredited professionals (i.e., registered social workers with at least a BSW) is increasingly being emphasized, especially in child protection. This has led to employment gains by social workers and less employment of para-professional workers. This emphasis on professionalism is expected to continue.

- Self-government for Aboriginal peoples, along with an emphasis on community delivery, will continue to shift delivery models towards Aboriginal or special agencies.

- As a sign of new programming to meet special needs, there was a recent (1999) announcement of a federal initiative on providing facilities for homeless people. More specific developments to meet the most crucial needs can be expected and, many of these will call for involvement of social workers and community workers.

- Organizations such as the National Crime Prevention Centre are calling for prevention
services to reduce long-term social problems and are noting that resources will need to be found for these initiatives.

All of the above are important policy-related changes in the social services sector environment and each has significant implications for human resources planning.

3. **Definitional Boundaries, Sector Re-structuring, and Employment Prospects**

The impacts on the labour force of changes in the structure of the social services sector, and related ones like health care, overlap considerably with the impacts of changing government policies. Each feeds into the other. These changes also are mixed in with the changing views of what constitutes several of the social services occupations.

- **Community delivery remains a major policy approach to meeting social service needs.** The early 1990s saw a major shift of employment out of government and into community-based setting in many jurisdictions other than Quebec. Further changes of this magnitude will not be seen but further growth will generally take place in community-based activity. The shift toward community-based delivery has had a further impact by reducing the demand for managers while maintaining demand for other qualified workers.

- **The growing number of elderly persons and rising health care expenditures are being met by policies emphasizing community health and home care service.** Currently the health care field makes use of nurses for case management in many community settings. An anticipated major shortage of nurses and the high growth of a wide range of community services for older people will combine to create opportunities for social services professionals.

- **The 1990s saw rapid growth in the counselling roles of social services workers.** The growth of this wide occupational group is partly because of the shift to community delivery emphasizing more specialized functions. However it is also indicative of changing needs of society. More specific and counselling responses appear to be called for as family structures shift or as drug and alcohol problems are addressed through workplace programs. It appears as through people are accepting services that are offered in this way.

Taking all aspects of demand into account, the sector (total for the 5 NOC codes) should see aggregate employment growth of about 2 percent a year, which is a lower rate than it was in the early 1990's. This expected employment growth would increase generally in line with the projected 2% Canadian population growth. This will mean that employment will grow annually at what is considered an average rate. Also, given the types of changes taking place, social worker employment, while unlikely to see a repeat of the higher growth rates of the early 1990s, is expected to have annual growth of at least 2 percent per year. A slightly higher than 2% employment growth rate is also expected for the family, marriage and other councillors occupational group. Lower, but some growth, is the most likely scenario for the management and para-professional worker fields, while probation officers are expected to increase in line with the social work profession. In addition, there will be some openings as a result of age-based retirement and voluntary withdrawal of currently employed social workers from the social service industry.

Annual requirements for new and replacement workers for these occupations will likely be a little lower than the situation seen in the 1991 to 1996 Census period. However, with continued emphasis on recruiting persons with more and more appropriate education, overall numbers of job openings for social work university graduates (approximately 2800 per year) should not be very different from the previous decade. The annual supply of new graduates from universities, which generally was sufficient to meet these overall requirements in the 1990s, should continue to be adequate to meet this projected demand in numeric terms. As seen from the Census data on occupations, the opportunities for social work graduates are by no means limited to the social worker occupation. The social work profession is also involved in the family, marriage and other counselling occupation as well as in management, probation and in the community and social services worker category. The assumption that the aggregate supply from the BSW route (if graduate numbers remain at levels seen in the
1990s) will be sufficient to meet projected demand, is based on finding that the annual requirement for workers into the field has slightly diminished over the 1990s. Yet, those with a social work degree, per se, are being recruited at a slightly greater rate than previously, to fill new or replacement positions.

There is still significant entry into social service occupations of those with psychology or sociology or related qualifications. Depending on the work functions these individuals perform, these positions might provide further opportunities for social work graduates who have been trained to work in more diverse settings. But it cannot be concluded that the numbers of "traditional" social work openings will be substantially increasing over the next five years or so.

The workforce adequately absorbed this increase in graduates as demonstrated by the low unemployment rate for social workers over those years. In general, the university system will not have a problem graduating enough social work degree students to meet the anticipated 2% growth employment growth for social workers, counsellors, and probation officers within its current level of enrolment. Please note that there are also people holding other types of degrees that are members of these occupational groups. The workforce will absorb social work graduates especially when considering the attrition rates. Each school will need to determine what growth rate is most appropriate in its case.

Even though it is anticipated that the current supply of social work graduates will meet overall numeric demands, educational institutions will be called upon to examine their curriculum to determine if their offerings match the growing needs for client-focused and employability skills. Tailoring the curriculum to emerging social programming needs such as Aboriginal, isolated communities and geriatric specialties as well as to meet organizational shifts is also crucial to positioning the graduate from the social worker field of studies. This will allow them to enter the social worker occupation across areas of emerging need as well as to take on professional roles in the more rapidly growing counselling specialization.

The college social services field is wider than just social work in terms of curriculum. College graduates from the social services field do not have as close a link to social services occupations as seen for university social work programs. It is, therefore, more difficult to assess the absorption of college graduates but it is expected that generally it will be similar to the patterns seen in the 1990s. Thus, from the limited data available, it appears that there would not be a need for substantial increase in enrolments to meet anticipated labour market needs.

B. Responding To Demand: Challenges for Social Work and the Social Services Sector

The research identified a number of demand factors shaping the human resource profile of the social services. These factors must be taken into account in order for the sector to be able to prepare current and future workers for full-fledged participation in the labour force. The response of the educational and training components of the sector will determine to a great degree how well the balance of supply and demand is maintained. There can never be a complete balance, because of the dynamic nature of the labour market, but if there is substantial imbalance on either side of the supply and demand equation, everyone loses out—students, employers, employees, and ultimately, those being served.

As important as education and training are to effective human resource development, there are other players in the field who must respond to the rapidly changing social services sector environment. These include government, in both policy-setting and employer roles, employers, and professional associations.

1. The Current Role of Education and Training in Responding to Demand

Both education in the formal post-secondary setting and training in the sense of continuing education and professional development are essential components of the response to labour market demand. The research findings indicate a substantial gap between what the demand side sees as the skills and knowledge that are called for in employees the
labour force and the basic preparation provided in the formal educational system, at the post-secondary level. This was reported more in reference to university training for the BSW.

Employers want people with the standard "employability skills." They want employees to have the ability to take initiative, to work in teams, to have excellent communication skills, and to have specific task-related skills. In the social services specifically they also want workers who can respond effectively to the target groups that are being served. The analysis of change drivers shows an increasing need for skills in serving the elderly, the mentally ill, families and children living with violence, youth, Aboriginal peoples and especially those among the burgeoning population of Aboriginal youth who may need services.

It appears from the survey of courses offered in universities across Canada that neither the demand for employability skills nor skill development to serve the highest priority and emerging service need groups are being sufficiently addressed in the university setting. (It appears that college-trained workers enter their first employment with more of the target groups skills employers desire, but the research did not allow for in-depth pursuit of this issue.)

While specific courses designed to enhance employability skills or to better serve many of the high (and emerging) need groups are few and far between, the practicum which is required in virtually all levels of social services education performs a crucial function in bridging the gap between employer needs and the preparedness of new hires. Both students and employers report that the practicum is the most effective part of training. It often plays a significant role in placement in a job, as well.

It is evident then, that there is a great deal of work to be done by the educational sector in responding more effectively to the needs of the labour market—which also means, in the final analysis, better meeting the needs of those in need.

In relation to training activities, the provision of professional development through associations and the on-the-job training of employers is an active, diverse enterprise. The social work occupation professional associations focus on increasing member knowledge of the larger policy context in which they work, helping them become more aware of emerging issues in practice, and in some cases, training in how to deal with the stresses of daily work. Whatever the range of training offered, the activity level of professional associations varies considerably by province and even by region within provinces or territories.

Though there are national social work association guidelines for professional development, these are unevenly applied and are in any case, not mandatory. Neither the associations nor provincial governments have set obligatory professional development standards as of yet. The situation for other social service occupations is even less formalized with reference to professional development as it relates to employment as social service workers. (There may be professional standards and certification requirements for some counsellor occupations, but these may or may not be closely tied to hiring practices in social service employment.)

Employers tend to provide skills enhancement directed to the immediate needs of their workplace, though in aggregate the range of skills addressed is quite wide. The breadth and depth of such training depends to a great degree on the employer's own awareness of the value of such training and on available funds.