

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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***Healthy Workplaces* project to address mental health of helping professions**

Edmonton, AB — Social workers, youth counselors, and other professionals in the human services industry care for our most vulnerable populations and are exposed to many work-related hazards. To find out if enough is being done to care for our carers, [*Healthy Workplaces for Helping Professions*](#) (HWHP), a three-year community-based research project, ramps up with a large-scale survey expected to gather data on the well-being of frontline workers in over 400 agencies serving vulnerable Albertans. The project's first major initiative, the survey's release coincides with Canada's [*Healthy Workplace Month*](#), an industry-led annual campaign that since 2001 has helped to build awareness of the importance of workplace health. Spearheaded by the University of Alberta's [*Faculty of Extension*](#) and with funding from the government of Alberta, the research project represents a partnership among advocacy groups for contracted agencies, the University of Alberta, and the provincial government.

The human services agency *Workplace Health Survey* will ask questions about job satisfaction, workplace health, and average daily levels of unhealthy stress to over 17,000 workers in the areas of child and youth care, family services, home visitation, disabilities services, and women's shelters. The survey will also ask agency workers what factors make them feel healthy and what factors threaten their workplace health. "One of the main stressors for workers in these areas is what we call *compassion fatigue*, which is the stress caused by trying to stay positive in the face of family difficulties," explains Dr. Thomas Barker, professor of Communication in the Faculty of Extension and principal investigator with the HWHP project. "Compassion fatigue often leads to burnout — a constant feeling of being tired, trouble connecting with clients, and thinking that you aren't making a difference."

The goal of the HWHP project is to help human service professionals develop strategies for change at the personal and agency level. Data collected through the survey will provide insight into what could make their workplaces healthier, but it's only one of the ways researchers will engage with professionals in the human services industry in Alberta. Also part of the project, the *Research Partnership Program* establishes a connection with Alberta-based human service agencies, while the *Be a Wellness Leader* program engages directly with workers interested in assuming a proactive role toward enhancing wellness in their workplace. "We are hoping to create a community of professionals who want to share ideas and provide helping professionals with resources for personal development," concludes Barker.

Partner organizations with the HWHP project include the Alberta Council of Disability Services (ACDS), Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS), Alberta Home Visitation Network Association (AHVNA), Align Association of Community Services, Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services, and Child and Youth Care Association of Alberta (CYCAA).

For more information, visit the *Healthy Workplaces* project website at www.hwHP.ca.