



2023

Aquatics Wage Survey Report



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For access to the raw data used to write this survey, please contact pro@prontario.org.

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Parks and Recreation Ontario thanks all interview and survey participants. Our work at PRO would not be possible without your support. In addition, PRO thanks the organizations that supported with the distribution of this survey: the Canadian Swim School Alliance and Lifesaving Society of Ontario.

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Introduction

The aquatics sector has long faced issues with the recruitment and retention of qualified staff to lifeguard and deliver programming. This was due in large part to the seasonal nature of aquatics work combined with the training required for employment. This challenge was exacerbated during the pandemic as pool closures and other public health mandates meant that many aquatic staff were laid off or seconded to other positions and organizations were unable to host aquatic leadership training programs. As a result, since 2020, Ontario has seen unparalleled shortages in lifeguards and swimming instructors that have had an impact on service provision.

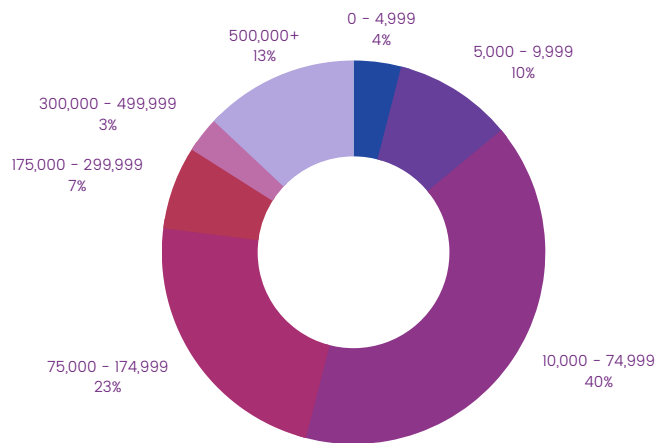
Based on requests from PRO members and stakeholders, in the fall of 2022, Parks and Recreation Ontario released the Aquatics Wage survey to gather data on staff recruitment and retention in the aquatics sector. The survey sought information on wages, other forms of compensation, and job titles and descriptions.

The survey included a mix of qualitative and quantitative questions and was distributed primarily through organic communication channels and cross-promoted by similar organizations in the sector. A total of 102 organizations responded from the private, non-profit, and public sectors.

Demographics

The 102 respondents to this survey included organizations from the public, non-profit, and private sectors along with instructional only organizations.

Chart 1: Population Served



Almost half of survey respondents represented organizations serving between 10,000 and 74,999 individuals. This is a slight overrepresentation of small to mid-sized communities. Of these organizations, 73% were public sector, 17% were non-profit organizations, and 7% were private sector. Of these respondents, 77% offered year-round services while 23% offered seasonal services only.

Overall, 3% of respondents were instructional only, while 97% of respondents reported owning, operating, or managing at least one facility or waterfront. Public sector organizations (largely municipalities) owned and operated a larger share of aquatics facilities. The raw data can also be sorted by community size to demonstrate access to infrastructure.

These factors have significant implications on staff teams and wages.

Chart 2: Facilities by Sector

Facilities	Public Sector	Non-Profit	Private
Indoor	91%	82%	57%
Outdoor	83%	24%	0
Staffed waterfronts	38%	0	0
Un-staffed waterfronts	47%	0	0

Indoor facilities were most popular as 86% of all respondents reported owning, operating, or managing at least one.

Employees and Compensation

On average, respondents employed 102 aquatic staff in a year. This number includes contract (part-time and full-time) and permanent employees. The average number of staff overall is buoyed by larger municipalities and organizations and is not necessarily reflective of the size of most aquatic staff teams. The chart below represents the average number of aquatic staff broken down by the size of population served.

Chart 3: Average Number of Aquatic Staff Employed by Population Served

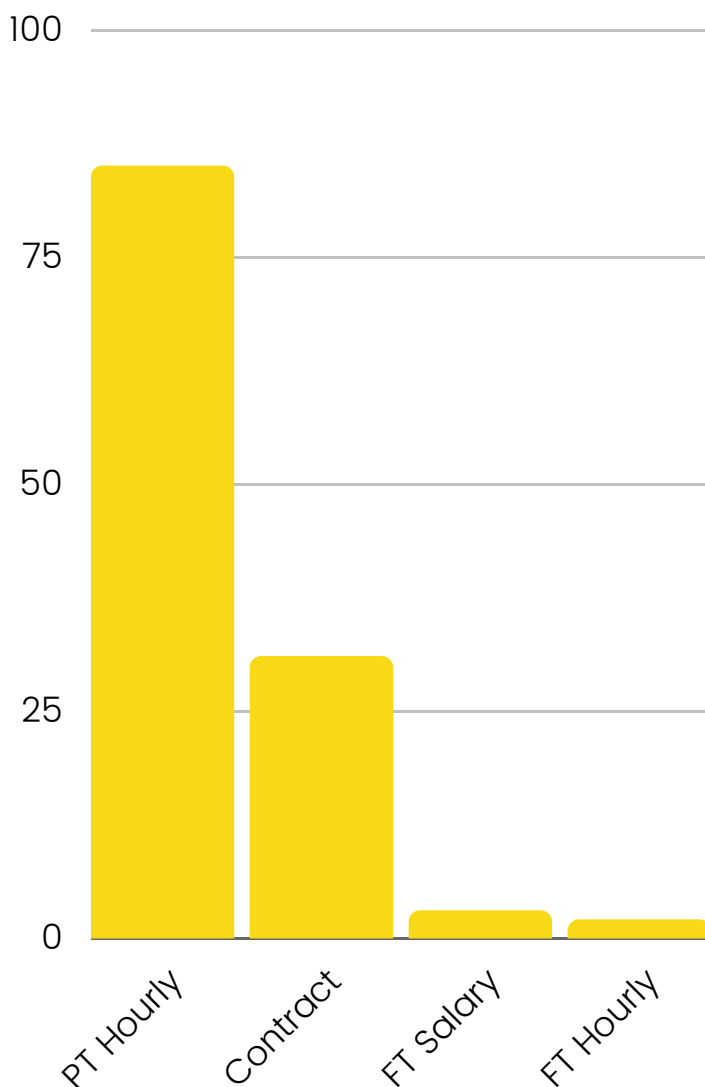
Population Served	All Aquatic Staff	Contract Aquatic Staff (PT and FT)	Full-Time Salary	Full-Time Hourly	Part-Time Hourly
0 - 4,999	14.5	4.3	0.8	0.5	10.5
5,000 - 9,999	69	13.2	0.7	1.2	15.7
10,000 - 74,999	58.6	17.1	1.1	1.1	30
75,000 - 174,999	92	35.1	2.9	1.3	75.8
175,000 - 299,999	175.8	73.8	7.7	2.6	138.3
300,000 - 499,999	99.7	73	4	1	84.7
500,000+	355.8	76.2	13.7	7.8	398

Employees and Compensation

On average, municipal or public sector organizations have larger staff teams with private and instructional only organizations often having the fewest. This aligns with the number of facilities and waterfronts municipalities are responsible for.

Out of the average number of employees hired in a single year, the majority are part-time hourly positions, and over one-third are temporary contracted employees. In addition, there is a 61% decrease in the number of staff between peak and off-season. This number is affected by smaller staff teams

Chart 4: Average Number of Aquatic Staff by Designation



in off-season, delivering fewer programs as waterfronts and outdoor facilities are closed, and by organizations that only operate for part of the year. Almost all organizations offering only seasonal programming do not retain staff during off-season.

Respondents identified the challenges in providing staff data particularly as aquatic teams have shifted significantly since the onset of the pandemic. In addition, it was noted that swim coach positions are a significant subsection of aquatic staff, particularly for private sector organizations.

Employees and Compensation

Faced with a shortage of aquatic staff, particularly instructors and lifeguards, many in the sector have or are currently in the process of revising aquatic wages to align with neighbouring organizations or other sectors. The chart below represents the range of average wages. Within these respondents, compensation was higher at public sector organizations.

Chart 5: Average Wage Range per Hour

Role	Average Wage Range
Lifeguard	\$17.80 - \$20.39
Instructor	\$18.94 - \$22.87
Head Lifeguard	\$20.24 - \$22.88
Leadership Instructor	\$23.50 - \$28.28
Senior Instructor Lifeguard	\$24.50 - \$27.83
AquaFit Instructor	\$25.00 - \$33.06
Programmer	\$29.70 - \$37.00
Supervisor/Coordinator	\$30.23 - \$36.66
Pool Manager	\$38.64 - \$44.73

Recruitment and Retention

Since 2020, PRO has consistently received feedback from members and stakeholders outlining the challenges in recruiting and retaining lifeguards and swim instructors at aquatics facilities across Ontario. This has resulted in fewer programs and open swim opportunities.

When asked about barriers to staff recruitment and retention, 38% of respondents indicated that the certification process was lengthy and difficult with 16% of respondents offering paid aquatics training and 9% fully subsidizing the recertification process for staff.

Chart 6: Barriers to Staff Recruitment and Retention



Certification Process Too Lengthy/Difficult: 38%
Funding (Unable to Offer Competitive Wages): 27%
Physicality of Position: 15%
Other: 20%

Other responses on barriers to staff recruitment and retention:

- Lack of interest in aquatic positions.
- The pandemic had a significant impact on the availability of aquatic leadership courses.
- Broadly, less interest among youth in working.
- Constant turnover with staff leaving for college and university.
- Level of responsibility versus compensation.

“... pre-COVID we were at about 395 staff. Post-COVID, once we tried to recall as many people as would come back, we were only able to secure 90 staff. So, we lost three-quarters of our aquatic staff, and that’s in large part due to the typical age of our aquatic staff. We hire them in high school, typically at 16 years of age. And within two years, they’re in grade 12 and focusing on education and then shortly thereafter moving away to university. So, the majority of our staff had moved on to their next career path.

And unfortunately, there weren’t any leadership courses running [during COVID] to have the next age group be certified. So, we were in a backlog of not enough aquatic staff, not enough coming up the stream to backfill positions.”

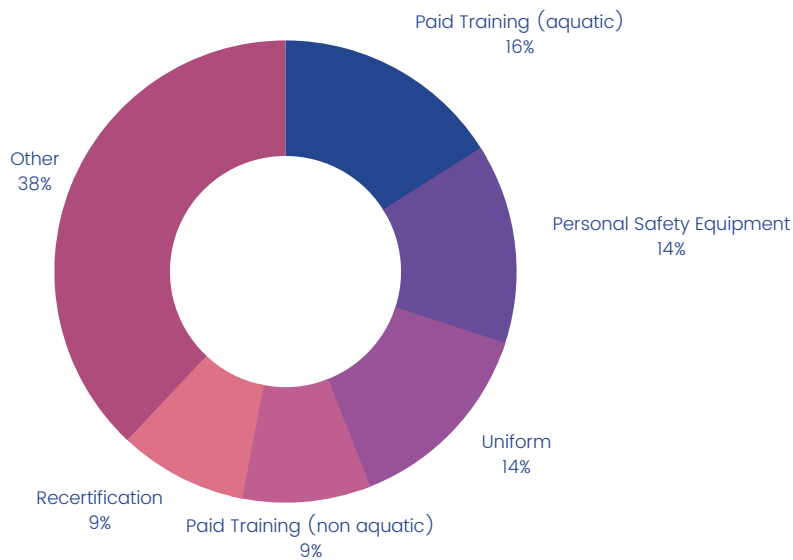
– Richard Fournier, Aquatic Coordinator, Richmond Hill

Recruitment and Retention

A key piece for the retention of aquatic staff is professional development and growth. 73% of respondents to the survey believe that there are opportunities for aquatic staff to grow within their organization while 16% say that there is little to no mobility for a variety of reasons. Notes included:

- Small department with little to no mobility
- Nothing beyond head lifeguard
- Only when a full-time employee retires or resigns
- Can apply for other jobs in recreation, will be treated as external and non-union

Chart 7: Benefits Offered to Part-Time or Seasonal Staff



Almost 100% of respondents reported offering additional benefits to part-time and/or seasonal staff. Other benefits identified include:

- Referral incentive
- Discounted fitness membership
- Prep time compensation for instructors
- Mileage
- Aquatic clothing annual allowance

“I now have waitlists, I never had waitlists before. Our business development group has stopped accepting requests for the pool... So, we’re losing money as a department because I can’t guarantee that I can staff it...my programming takes a lot longer to create because I’m building contingency plans. You don’t put a level 1 and 3 at the same time, you put a 1 and 2 so if you only [have] one instructor, you can cut the number in half for each, combine the class. So, it takes a lot of maneuvering to create a program schedule and plan for contingencies of no staff.”

– Rebecca Boyd, Manager of Intramural Sports, Sports Clubs, Aquatics, First Aid, York University

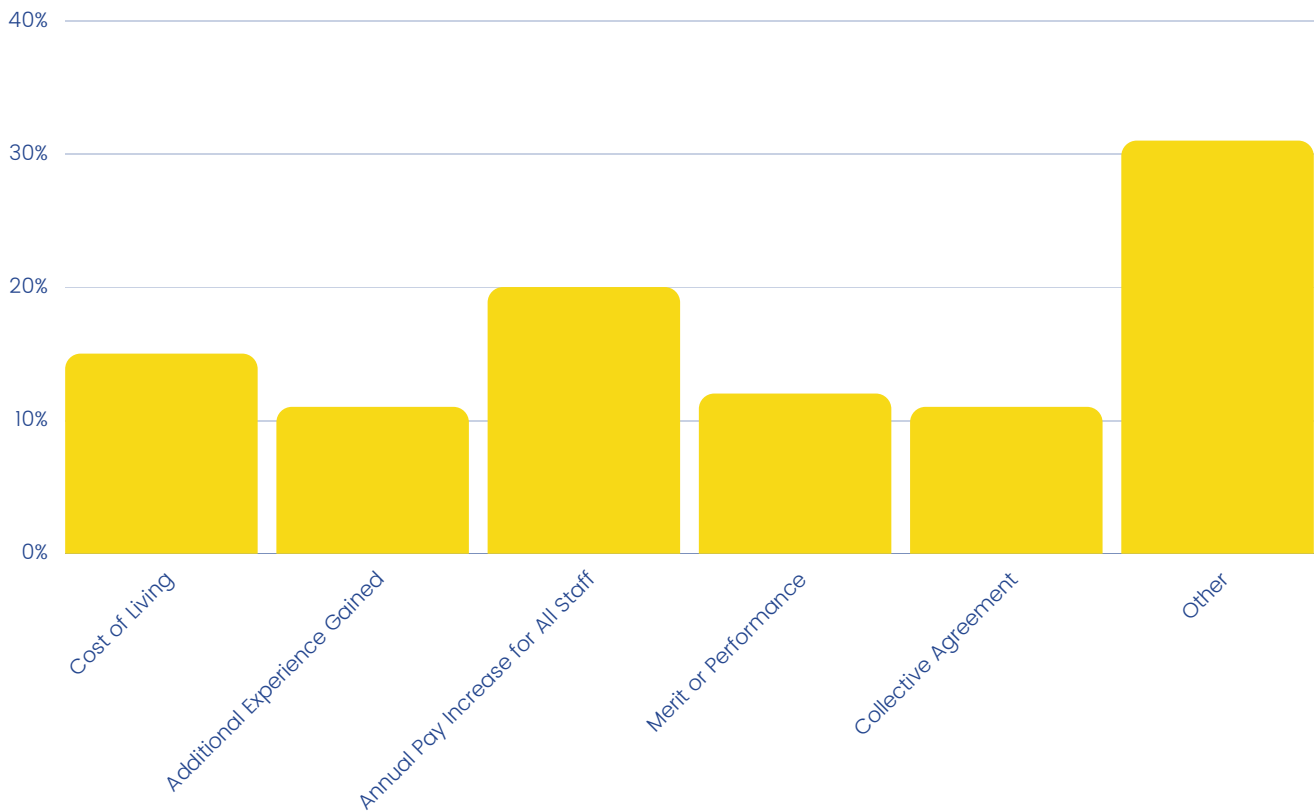
Recruitment and Retention

Rate of pay has been identified as a key barrier not only to recruitment but to the long-term retention of high quality staff. With recent increases in minimum wage and the explosion of virtual work opportunities, aquatic positions are in competition with jobs that are similar in pay with fewer responsibilities.

The most common method used to determine changes in pay by respondents is an annual pay increase while the least common was a collective agreement. Other methods to determine pay increases identified by respondents include:

- Quarterly increase for all
- When minimum wage increases
- Through annual budget, not guaranteed
- Municipal pay structure

Chart 8: Determination of Pay Increase



Case Study: City of Brampton



In 2022, facing a shortage of aquatic staff, the City of Brampton developed a free aquatic leadership certification program to remove key barriers to access employment opportunities in the aquatics sector.

The program begins with a wet assessment, where participants learn about the necessary skills and physical requirements to be successful in aquatic leadership programs in a low-risk environment. Participants that passed the assessment then went on to complete the certification, while

unsuccessful participants were able to identify areas required for improvement.

To make the program even more accessible, the City's recreation department partnered with the Brampton Library to make copies of required aquatic leadership manuals available at no cost as well.

In structuring this program, the City addressed three key barriers to entry to the field:

1. Availability of aquatic leadership programs.
2. Certification costs.
3. Training costs.

A total of 263 individuals participated in this program in 2022, leading to 78 new staff and 102 new aquatic volunteers which supported an increase in the number of swimming lessons offered to the community. Due to the success of the program, the City has committed to this initiative for the rest of 2023.

The City of Brampton is the 2023 recipient of the PRO Aquatics Award for Excellence in Access and Equity.

Recommendations

The pandemic had a deep impact on the learner to lifeguard pipeline that aquatics providers had long relied on to staff programs and facilities. The resulting closure of facilities and programs will have real consequences for public health and safety.

Proposed solutions to this issue must be multi-pronged and address the full list of barriers to employment in the sector. This includes:

- Key infrastructure investments that would support more equitable access to opportunities for exposure and learning to swim;
- Innovative approaches to the inclusion of marginalized groups such as intergenerational and co-participation programs;
- High quality learn to swim programs with instructors trained on the needs of children in recreation settings that will support positive interactions and help ensure long-term participation in aquatics;
- The development of a framework for province-wide collaboration with school boards to include aquatic leadership programs as credit programs to incentivize training and lower the financial barrier to entering the sector;
- Low or no cost certification opportunities; and
- Lowering the mandatory minimum age for employment as lifeguards and instructors, thus giving the 3000 qualified 15-year-olds in Ontario the opportunity to pursue employment in this sector.

There is an increasing level of public and political awareness around staffing issues in the aquatics sector. This is reflected in the level of mobilization we see in the media, through organizations such as PRO, the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, Canadian Swim School Alliance, Lifesaving Society, and in government.

“[During COVID] we missed that engagement of the 13-years-olds to start that [lifeguard] programming so now we’re trying to get those...15/16-year-olds right now very engaged... Because they haven’t been doing it for the past few years, it’s been harder to get them engaged. I have a number of 13-year-olds that are well engaged, but that’s going to be a couple years until we can hire them.”

– Denis Giles, General Manager of Aquatics, YMCA of Southwestern Ontario



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