

## BACKGROUND

April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019

### **Community & Social Services Leaders Call on Provincial Government to Demonstrate Fair & Equitable Practices**

#### **What are Community Social Services?**

Social services in British Columbia are delivered primarily by community based agencies under service agreements with several provincial ministries and authorities, the largest funder being the Ministry of Social Development through Community Living British Columbia. Hundreds of these agencies operate with union, blended, and non-union workforces.

A majority of people in BC have, at one time or another, come into contact with community social services providers. The services delivered through contracts with agencies are support, development and care programs for a wide variety of vulnerable citizens, including people with physical, mental and developmental disabilities, at-risk youth, women experiencing family violence, new Canadians, refugees and non-English speaking residents, aboriginal individuals and communities, and children who witness abuse.

Members receive contract revenue from the following provincial ministries/authorities:

- Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
- Ministry of Children and Family Development
- Ministry of Education
- BC Housing
- Ministry of Health (including regional authorities)
- Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training
- Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction
- Community Living British Columbia

#### **Who are the employees in Community Social Services?**

There are over 20,000 employees in community social services. 80% of the workforce are women. The work is demanding, requiring careful attention and support for people who are among the most vulnerable citizens in the Province. Our employees are working in less structured environments than hospitals and schools and are often on their own, following complex care plans with intermittent support from their supervisors and health care professionals. The employees in community social services provide supports 24 hours per day, seven days per week. Our employees often provide long term supports to individuals and their families and become valued team members. It is work of the heart and once staff get connected to the mission, to treat them unfairly as government is proposing is profoundly disrespectful.

### **What is Low Wage Redress?**

Low Wage Redress is intended to help remedy the recruitment and retention challenges in the community social services sector. It is intended to raise the wages of the lowest paid workers in the public sector. It will significantly close, if not eliminate, the wage gap with workers in equivalent positions in the health sector. This gap between the wages in social services and the wages paid to community health workers and classroom assistants is the primary cause of the recruitment and retention challenge in community social services.

### **How does the Recruitment and Retention Challenge affect the delivery of community social services?**

In the most recent compensation and turnover survey, agencies reported an average turnover rate of 18.6% for unionized agencies and 20.4% for non-union agencies. Agencies report that service delivery challenges include:

- Constant need for orientation and training of new staff.
- Difficulty in responding to new service requests.
- Difficulty filling shifts when staff are sick or want vacation time.

The survey also identified reasons for turnover. Across the sector, the main reason for employees leaving was “voluntary”. Leaving for a new position or higher wages is one of the key reasons people are leaving the community social services. It is hoped that Low Wage Redress will reduce turnover and improve recruitment efforts of community social service agencies.

### **What problems will a discriminatory application of Low Wage Redress cause?**

- The current plan for Low Wage Redress funds employees in the same agency differently. Many agencies have some service locations unionized and others that are non-union. The unionized employees will receive an additional 3.3% increase, and their colleagues in the same agency will not receive the increase while delivering the same community service.
- Employees in the community social services sector work in the community and often work beside employees from other agencies. Providing wage increases to only a segment of the workers in the community social service sector is divisive and disrespectful.
- Paraprofessionals in some agencies are unionized and in other agencies are non-union. These positions are very difficult to fill. The low wage redress for paraprofessionals is significantly higher than 3.3% and will cause some communities to lose the services of paraprofessionals who leave to work with agencies that are receiving the increases.

### **How has government funded wage increases in the community social services sector in the past?**

The first time a significant funding discrepancy occurred was in 1998. An unfair labour practice complaint was filed against the government and once a hearing was set before the labour relations board, government agreed to provide equivalent increases through a commitment to provide increases to non-union agencies of 29.5% over three years.

In 2006, a four year agreement was reached to provide labour peace through the Olympics. It took some advocacy and education, but eventually government agreed to fund the 2% increases annually for all workers, union and non-union. From 2006, the funding increases have been equitable:

- All agencies received a 2% increase each year between 2006 and 2009.
- All agencies received funding to participate in the MPP in 2010.
- All agencies received the same treatment in the cooperative gains years (2013, 2014).
- All agencies received the General Wage Increases and Economic Stability Mandate increases from 2014 to 2019.

The latest agreement was ratified in the community social services sector in the summer of 2018. CSSEA members expected, based on the past 25 years of experience, that they would receive funding for increases for their union and non-union staff. To provide differential, discriminatory funding within an agency is unthinkable disruptive. Non union agencies were also cautiously optimistic that they would receive equivalent funding increases. They had 12 years of experiencing equivalent funding increases. Only two weeks before the funding increases were to take effect on April 1, 2019, agencies received notice that only unionized employees would receive the low wage redress. Government must review this decision and provide equivalent increases to all community social services agencies and their employees.

### **What is the BC CEO Network?**

The BC CEO Network a Provincial Network of CEOs of community social services agencies; representing union and non-union, private agencies and non-profit societies. Three broad objectives were identified in early meetings and have remained the focus of the Network:

1. To facilitate a Collective Voice
2. To promote effective business practices
3. To promote leadership development and mutual support

For more information visit: <http://bcceonetwork.ca/WP/>

### **What is a microboard?**

A Microboard™ is a small group of committed family and friends (a minimum of 5 people) who join together with the individual to create a non-profit society. It is a formal support group that may also access funding the individual may be eligible to receive. They were first developed in BC over thirty years ago and are an effective and popular method of delivering individualized support to a person with disabilities. For more information visit: <https://www.velacanada.org/>

### **What is Inclusion BC?**

Inclusion BC is a non-profit federation working with partners to build community and to enhance the lives of children and youth with special needs, adults with intellectual disabilities and their families by

supporting abilities, promoting action and advancing rights, responsibilities and social justice. Our vision is a world where we all belong. For more information visit: <https://inclusionbc.org/>

Link to more information on the Community Social Services Turnover:

Turnover Survey: [https://www.cssea.bc.ca/PDFs/Reports/2018\\_Employee\\_Turnover\\_Report.pdf](https://www.cssea.bc.ca/PDFs/Reports/2018_Employee_Turnover_Report.pdf)

Link to Sustainable Services Mandate with PSEC: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/employers/public-sector-employers/public-sector-bargaining/mandates-and-agreements>

Link to Summary of changes in new collective agreement for Community Social Services:

[https://www.cssea.bc.ca/PDFs/Collective\\_Agreements/2019\\_Summary\\_of\\_Changes.pdf](https://www.cssea.bc.ca/PDFs/Collective_Agreements/2019_Summary_of_Changes.pdf)

Link to MCFD letter to agencies outlining discriminatory funding decision:

[https://sscl.sharevision.ca/public/wageequity/Document%20Library/1/Government%20Communications/MCFD\\_March2019.pdf](https://sscl.sharevision.ca/public/wageequity/Document%20Library/1/Government%20Communications/MCFD_March2019.pdf)

- 30 -

**Media Inquiries:**

Doug Tennant

Board Chair | BC CEO Network

Ph: 778.994.6757 | Em: <mailto:boardchair@bcceonetwork.ca>