

2006 UPDATE on **Bargaining** #16

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March 31, 2006

Tentative agreement reached

A tentative agreement has been reached covering 15,000 community social services workers in B.C. The four-year deal includes wage increases totalling 8.3 percent, wage parity increases, and a pension plan at the end of the agreement. An additional 1.6 percent will go into workers' pockets annually after the first year, when employers resume Medical Services Plan contributions. Full-time workers will receive a \$4,200 signing bonus (pro-rated for part-timers and casuals.)

"We are proud to have finally achieved a pension plan for the only group of public workers who lacked coverage. This pension plan, wage increases, improved job security, and a signing bonus are meaningful gains," says B.C. Government and Services Employees' Union president George Heyman. The BCGEU represents two-thirds of the workers in the public sector.

Heyman says he believes the Union Bargaining Association made the best deal possible at this time, but charges that the B.C. government continues to be stingy with this lowest-paid group of public sector workers, and must still adequately address the recruitment and retention crisis in the sector.

"This government continues to pursue a low-wage policy in community social services. It's unfair to these workers who were forced to take severe rollbacks in their last agreement. It is also contradictory and disappointing that while the finance minister touts B.C.'s economic prosperity, she wouldn't find the funds to establish this long-overdue pension plan earlier in the agreement. It appears that even though their work is vitally important to vulnerable British Columbians, these workers and the people they care for are a low priority for Carole Taylor and her government."

Heyman warns there will be no workforce stability in community social services as long as workers can get \$2-\$15 more an hour by doing the comparable job in the health or school sectors.

Heyman notes there was great frustration during the bargaining process. He charges that, "Employers failed to resolve any meaningful issues during the first two months of bargaining, and were unable to supply accurate costing figures required by the Labour Code. This made negotiations unnecessarily difficult, in this final week, with a large number of important but unresolved issues left to the end.

"The Union Bargaining Association has worked hard to achieve this tentative agreement. Members have fought hard for respect and fairness, and certainly continue to deserve more. All the unions involved will continue our work to see that these workers get the respect and compensation they deserve."

B.C. Government
and Services
Employees' Union

Canadian Union
of Public Employees

Hospital
Employees' Union

Health Sciences
Association of
British Columbia

United Food and
Commercial Workers
International Union

International Union
of Operating
Engineers

Construction and
Specialized Workers'
Union

United Steelworkers
of America

National Automobile,
Aerospace,
Transportation
and General Workers
Union of Canada
(CAW-Canada)

British Columbia
Nurses' Union

Canadian
Translators and
Interpreters Guild

Professional
Employees'
Association

Christian Labour
Association
of Canada

Community
Social
Services

Union
Bargaining
Association

cep 467 cope 378

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Community Social Services tentative agreement details

Length of collective agreement

Four years, expires March 31, 2010.

Wage increases

Total 8.3 percent over four years (equals 8.56 percent compounded):

- ↑ 2.3 percent effective April 1, 2006;
- ↑ 2 percent on April 1 of each remaining year.
- ↑ Wage increases also apply to Non-Provincially Funded (NPF) positions.

Note: This applies to General Services and Community Living Services. The Aboriginal Services agreement details will be outlined in a separate bulletin.

Wage equity adjustments

Approximately \$2 million over four years for wage equity increases to be determined by the Joint Job Evaluation Committee. The committee will determine the specific wage rate increases and advise members within 30 days of ratification. The increases will be retroactive to April 1, 2006, and be applied every April 1 in following years of the agreement.

Benefits

More money in members pockets - an increase of 1.6 percent in take-home pay when employers resume paying for Medical Services Plan premiums, effective April 1, 2007.

If an employer tries to go outside the Health Benefits Trust to provide benefit coverage, they must provide equivalent benefits as detailed in the agreement.

Premium pay for casuals

Casuals will now receive time-and-a-half for hours worked on paid holidays.

Banked hours for part-timers

Part-time employees can choose to bank their 4.2 percent holiday pay, and receive a day in lieu for statutory holidays.

This gives part-time workers more options, and removes the incentive that employers were using to create a part-time sector.

Pension plan

Government has committed to providing members with a public pension plan at the end of the fourth year.

Job security

A new Continuity of Service and Employment Agreement now covers all provincial funders. It includes job protection for any new certifications. This is especially important if an agency is re-tendered. The employees have the right to be interviewed by the new employer.

Improved rights

Layoff and recall - more bumping and recall options.

Scheduling - more protection against arbitrary changes in schedules.

Hours of work - we held the line on reasonable hours of work. The employers were asking for the right to assign shifts, and schedule extended-hour shifts up to 16 hours or longer.

Postings and promotion - seniority counts more in lateral transfers, promotions, and for internal and external job postings.

Harassment protection - anti-bullying language added.

Stewards - Employers have agreed to notify stewards of new members, jointly create a fact sheet on grievance procedures, and provide straight-time pay for Occupational Health & Safety committee members.

Transportation allowance

\$.41 per kilometre.

Signing bonus

A one-time signing bonus of:

- ↑ \$4,200 for each for every full-time worker (must have 35 hrs/wk. or 1820 hrs/yr.) Bonus amount is pro-rated for part-time and casual workers.

The schedule for ratification, and further tentative agreement details, will follow in coming days.