



Caring for a Living

The Community Social Services Bargaining Association of Unions collectively represents more than 15,000 community-based social service workers in British Columbia.

BC Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU)

Canadian Union of Public Employees' (CUPE)

Hospital Employees' Union (HEU)

Health Sciences Association of BC (HSABC)

Construction and Specialized Workers' Union Local 1611 (CSWU)

United Food and Commercial Workers' Union Local 1518 (UFCW)

United Steelworkers of America (USW)

Service Employee's International Union (SEIU)

BC Nurses' Union (BCNU)

Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC)

April 16, 2020

Email: bonnie.henry@gov.bc.ca

Dr. Bonnie Henry
Provincial Health Officer
Ministry of Health
4th floor, 1515 Blanshard St
Victoria, BC

RE: Personal Protective Equipment and Access to COVID-19 Testing for Community Social Service Workers

Dear Dr. Henry:

I am writing this letter to you in my capacity as the spokesperson for the Community Social Services Bargaining Association (CSSBA). The CSSBA is an association of independent unions that collectively represent more than two-thirds of workers in the community social services sector in the province and includes the BC Government and Service Employees' Union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the Hospital Employees' Union, the Health Sciences Association, the Construction and Specialized Workers' Union, the Christian Labour Association of Canada, the United Steelworkers of Canada, United Food and Commercial Workers' Union, and the BC Nurses' Union.

Firstly, we would like to express our appreciation and gratitude for the forthright manner in which both your office and the provincial government generally, have conveyed information to British Columbians during the COVID-19 pandemic. Like you, the CSSBA is committed to ensuring that we "flatten the curve" through compliance with your directives.

We also appreciate the recent expansion of the COVID-19 testing recommendations to workers in congregate settings including shelters and group homes, as well as by referral by a worker's physician based on their professional judgement. This allows community social service workers who work in those environments and provide direct care to clients in other settings critical access to testing in a timely manner.

Collectively, and on behalf of our over 17,000 unionized members in the community social services sector, we remain concerned about the inequities in the provision of personal protective equipment between community social service workers and their counterparts in the health sector performing the same or similar duties, in the same or similar working conditions. These concerns are heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic when the vast majority of our members continue to provide services to clients in their workplaces and in their clients' homes.

Every day in communities and neighbourhoods across B.C. our members provide vital services to some of our province's most vulnerable citizens including children, people with developmental disabilities, immigrants and refugees, women and children experiencing violence, adults and youth in conflict with the law, and Indigenous individuals and families on and off reserve. Often this work involves providing services to clients that do not and cannot understand the necessity of social or physical distancing, nor the concept or reality of transmission precautions due to mental or behavioural challenges or the nature of their living conditions. The care and support our members provide often involves circumstances where physical distancing is impossible and may also involve direct care to clients such as toileting, feeding, bathing, administering medication, and similar personal care. Work such as this, where physical distancing is impossible and where personal care often necessitates intimate contact with clients, is very similar in nature to much of the work performed in the health sector in acute care, long term care, or community health settings.

The constituent unions of the CSSBA have learned through a deluge of comments, concerns and complaints from our community social services membership that they are feeling inordinate pressure to attend at work and to provide care and support for their clients, with little or no recognition for the risks they assume in doing so. Further, the acknowledged lack of personal protective equipment for our workers in this sector may place them at additional risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus in the course of their duties. These disparities are particularly challenging when workers in other sectors are receiving appropriate personal protective equipment and training for its use in circumstances similar to our members.

Workers within the community social services sector must be assured that they have safe work, including appropriate access to personal protective equipment. It is the employer's responsibility to ensure safe workplaces and, while we appreciate the challenges employers may face with respect to shortages of personal protective equipment, it is critical that our members receive the same protection as workers in the health sector receive – protection that is dictated by the *Workers Compensation Act* and its related regulation. More must be done as we continue to hear from our front-line workers that they lack the equipment and/or the appropriate training to keep them safe.



We implore you to ensure that workers in the community social services sector receive the appropriate personal protective equipment and the training in the use and disposal of same that is required for the work that they do.

We look forward to your response and guidance.

Yours truly,

Andrea L. Davis

Andrea L. Davis,
Spokesperson, CSSBA

cc: *Andrea Duncan, BCGEU*
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