



April 22, 2020

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.

Via Email: gmateus@cssea.bc.ca

Mr. Gentil Mateus, Chief Executive Officer
Community Social Services Employers' Association
Suite 800 - 555 Burrard Street
Vancouver, BC V7X 1M8

Dear Mr. Mateus:

RE: Fair Pay and Safe Working Conditions for Community Social Service Workers

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)

I am writing this letter to you in my capacity as the spokesperson for the Community Social Services Bargaining Association (CSSBA). Collectively, we are concerned about the inequities in pay and working conditions between community social service workers and workers 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 and may also involve direct care to clients such as toileting, feeding, bathing, administering medication, and other 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. 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 the health sector are receiving appropriate personal protective equipment and, in some sectors, workers are receiving wage supplements for performing their duties in the unique circumstances of this pandemic.

Many workers performing front line work in the grocery, banking, food, and retail sector, as well as some non-government funded childcare and community social services agencies, are receiving additional pay in light of the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. We encourage you to provide the same consideration to CSS workers working on the front line providing direct care to their clients.



Further, we ask that you consider additional benefits for our members in these extraordinary times, such as:

- Providing sick pay at 100% of wages, given the added concerns during this pandemic
- Providing meal allowances to workers who cannot leave their worksites
- Providing a clothing allowance or laundry allowance in appreciation of additional washing that must occur or where employers are demanding work related footwear and clothing
- Providing a general allowance which allows workers to address additional costs arising from working during the pandemic

Like the health care workers in British Columbia, our community social services workers are on the front line during this crisis and they feel that their work is being de-valued by failing to ensure appropriate levels of personal protective equipment and by placing a premium on the work of some and not others.

Workers within the community social services sector must be assured that they have safe work and fair pay, including appropriate access to personal protective equipment. It is the employers' 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. More must be done as we are still routinely hearing 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 training in the use and disposal of same. We also reiterate our expectation that our members receive the same treatment as other workers in other sectors with the provision of comparable pay and benefits to address the unique demands and challenges of working during this pandemic.

Yours truly,

Andrea L. Davis
Spokesperson, CSSBA

cc: *Andrea Duncan, BCGEU*
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