

A message from

Honourable

Shane Simpson

Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction



Social Services Sector Roundtable COVID-19 Communique April 7, 2020

ATTENDING MEMBERS:

Minister Shane Simpson (Chair)
BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres
BC CEO Network
BC Government and Service Employees' Union
Board Voice Society of BC
Canadian Union of Public Employees
Community Social Services Employers Association of BC
Ending Violence Association of BC
Federation of Community Social Services of BC
Provincial Association of Residential & Community Agencies
Community Living BC
Ministry of Children and Family Development
Ministry of Health
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction
Public Sector Employers' Council Secretariat

Messages from Minister Simpson / SSS Roundtable Members

- Minister Simpson stated his commitment to persons with disabilities and that they are treated equally during the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Minister Simpson expressed concern that some disability stakeholder groups have been alleging that people with disabilities are not being given the same consideration as other people during the COVID-19 outbreak.
- He asked that if people were aware of specific concerns about lack of appropriate treatment of people with disabilities that those be brought forward so they can be addressed, since non-specific allegations only added to people's anxieties and stress.

- He stressed that we all need to work together throughout the COVID-19 outbreak to keep everyone – people with disabilities and people without – healthy and safe.
- Minister Simpson extended congratulations to Rick FitzZaland, Executive Director, Federation of Community Social Services of BC, for his appointment to the B.C. Economic Recovery Task Force, and also noted that Queenie Choo, CEO, S.U.C.C.E.S.S., was another representative from the non-profit sector that had been appointed.
- Minister Simpson committed to ongoing weekly meetings and keeping communication channels open.
- Rick FitzZaland provided a brief update on the B.C. Economic Recovery Task Force. He expressed his appreciation that government is already planning for economic recovery and also recognizes the important role that the community social services sector plays in the economy.
- Ross Chilton, CEO, Community Living BC, expressed appreciation for the support and guidance being provided by the Office of the Provincial Health Officer.

Key Information Updates

The COVID-19 situation is constantly evolving as is the information being made available to support service providers.

The B.C. government website contains links to important health information as well as non-health-related information: www.gov.bc.ca/covid-19

Government also issues a daily summary on latest number of COVID-19 cases, and any other COVID-19 related news. People can subscribe here: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/subscribe?ministries=health&ministries=emergency-preparedness§ors=economy§ors=government-operations§ors=services>

Provincial Health Officer (PHO) Update

Richmond/Vancouver Group Home Cases

- Dr. Behn Smith spoke to the ethical decision-making framework in place and to the PHO media protocol when talking about individual cases.
- The PHO out or respect for the privacy of the individual and their family will not release details to the media. Local health authorities follow up with affected individuals, do the contact tracing, and provide guidance.
- The PHO and team deeply feel the deaths of all individuals and stress the importance of the measures that the PHO is asking all of us to take to keep us safe.

- The PHO looks to the evidence and ethical frameworks to make best decisions going forward. A top priority is to not overwhelm the health care system so that the health needs of all British Columbians can be met.

Testing Availability

- Given the increase in testing capacity, new testing guidelines are being released imminently and will be posted to the BC CDC website and shared with the lab network.
- The new guidelines will elevate testing for people in shelters or group homes. In addition, any doctor will be able to order a test based on clinical needs.

UPDATE: guidelines were released April 8:

<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/covid-19-care/lab-testing>
(html)

link to pdf: http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Statistics%20and%20Research/Statistics%20and%20Reports/Epid/Influenza%20and%20Respiratory/ERV/BCCDC_PHL_Updated_nCoV_Lab_Guidance.pdf

Masks

- The most effective ways to reduce the spread of COVID-19 are physical distancing, frequent hand hygiene and cleaning & disinfection.
- Masks can help reduce the spread of the virus when used by people who have symptoms; as a preventative measure to keep their infected droplets in.
- The Public Health Agency of Canada provides advice on using home-made masks: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks.html>

Ongoing transparency and communications remain imperative.

Appendix 1: Questions & Answers

SSSR Member Questions.

BC CEO Network

1. Is there a way to defer Licensing Inspections until post this crisis? It seems counter-intuitive to have Licensing Officers arriving in locations that are shut-down to visitors and want to conduct inspections. This is an issue that needs to be raised with Health and might not be appropriate for the Roundtable, but we are not entirely sure where else to take it.

A: To be discussed at meeting with Ministry of Health on April 8.

2. Recruitment and Retention is critical and has not decreased in the face of COVID-19; at the same time, our sector is doing phenomenal work in communities across the province and going largely unrecognized. Is there a way in which we can leverage the commitment of our sector and the value of the work it is doing that might ultimately assist with Recruitment/Retention? I know this seems like a bit of an "off-side" right now in the middle of all the turmoil but it has come up in a few recent conversations so I thought I'd share.

A: It was agreed that the immediate focus of the meetings needs to be on addressing concerns related to COVID-19 and this is deferred until a later date.

Federation of Community Social Services of B.C.

3. We have one question/discussion item for the Roundtable with is that we'd like to talk about how we can start to act within the spirit of the strategic HR plan as we address staffing challenges right now related to COVID-19. With social services being declared an essential service there is pressure on a system that already had labour challenges to staff up. This is particularly true for residential services (CLBC, MCFD, BC Housing, Transition Houses). Staff working in many of these jobs make less than what others are getting on emergency EI (and this is compounded by the union/non-union wage gap still to be addressed). BC Housing is topping up wages in some cases and we'd like to discuss a whole sector approach to compensation that could help to mitigate significant staffing gaps across the sector/funders.

A Members noted that different employers and funders are taking different approaches to try to keep workers. Some members noted that some employers were providing "incentive" pay to keep their workers at this time.

There was agreement that compensation needs to be addressed quickly and as a whole across the sector.

Government staff pointed back to Deputy Minister Galbraith's earlier comments about continuing the Roundtable's efforts to address staffing issues and that conversations were ongoing within the Ministry of Finance with regard to funding. It was also acknowledged that a few isolated instances have come to light where a local response to service delivery challenges does give rise to concerns about consistency of approach.

This item will be kept on the agenda and discussed at next week's meeting.