

A message from
Honourable
Shane Simpson
Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction



Social Services Sector Roundtable COVID-19 Communique April 21, 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 made members aware of the [April 21st news release](#) announcing up to \$35.6 million being made available to CLBC service providers and home-sharing providers.
- He also confirmed that government has extended the provisions of maintaining full contract costs even for those who are unable to deliver their programs until May 31. Government expects service providers to continue to pay staff and operating costs with this continued cash flow.
- Contracted service providers should continue working with funding ministries and agencies to determine how to adapt their provision of services to minimize

transmission of COVID-19.

- Provincial government ministry representatives each gave an update on case load and service delivery issues:
 - SDPR – saw an additional 5,000 people going on to assistance – largest increase since 2008 economic downturn. Largely young single males.
 - CFD – no increases yet; currently working with contracted service providers on developing metrics.
 - PSSG – hearing about some increases in cases of domestic violence; currently working with the three provincial agencies and will continue to monitor impacts to service delivery.
 - CLBC – no increases yet; closely monitoring what is happening with the school system, since the schools ability to assist vulnerable learners will impact CLBC
 - MAH – since the launch of the temporary rental supplement program over 42,000 applications received and 2,500 cheques issued. In the Residential Tenancy Branch, volumes are down since there's currently no evictions, although phone calls have increased by 30 to 40%

Key Information

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

NEW! On April 21, the B.C. government announced emergency funding available to CLBC service providers: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020SDPR0013-000730>

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>

Link to testing guidelines: 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

Interim Guidance to Social Services: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19-pho-guidance-social-service-providers.pdf>

Provincial Health Officer (PHO) Update

Current Epidemiology

- Dr. Behn Smith noted that epidemiologically that B.C.'s curve has flattened and that there are fewer new cases. She mentioned that Dr. Henry compares it to being in the "eye of the storm."
- Public health will be scientific, careful and methodical about moving into the next phase in considering what restrictions can be eased and when.
- Right now it is important to hold the line and continue with existing measures of (1) physical distancing, (2) hand washing, and (3) disinfection and enhanced cleaning protocols.

Testing

- Currently only Island Health and Vancouver Coastal Health regions offer mobile swabbing and both are operating at full capacity.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- The Province continues to try to bolster B.C.'s supplies of personal protective equipment; however, are not in a position yet to allocate supplies beyond formal health care settings.
- If people are unsure of personal protective equipment supplies being offered to them from an entity other than a health authority, they should use only in conjunction with the existing public health measures of physical distancing, frequent handwashing and regular disinfection and enhanced cleaning protocols.

Appendix 1: Questions & Answers

Federation (April 21)

1. How are funders/Ministries dealing with year end reporting from their contracted agencies? Has anyone extended their deadlines?

A: Ministry representatives advised that there has been flexibility and when contractors have asked for extensions those have been granted. Contractors should discuss with their respective portfolio or contract manager.

- 2. How are funders/Ministries dealing with the additional COVID-19 costs an agency may incur (i.e. for purchasing online platforms or other tech requirements)?**

A: Ministry representatives encouraged contracted service providers to talk to their respective contract manager. Requests were considered based on whether they were reasonable and to what degree they fell within parameters of what was usually funded.

- 3. How are your contracted service providers documenting any cases of COVID-19 in their facilities? CLBC and MCFD are using the MCFD after-hours line - what are others doing?**

A: Dr. Behn Smith clarified that local health authorities do this work. If a service provider has a suspected or confirmed case of COVID19, they should contact the local health authority. The local health authority will then do the contact tracing and provide appropriate health guidance to affected individuals and to the service providers.

- 4. Announcements have been made at the federal level about funding for wages for essential workers in long-term care facilities. How will this be rolled out in BC?**

A: PSEC is currently working with the Ministry of Finance on this and working to maximize B.C.'s share of the funding.

Tim Agg - Executive Director of QMUNITY

- 5. On the loss of in-person events (e.g. Pride) expected to create difficulties for arts as well as community service organizations. QMUNITY (BC's LGBTQ2S+ social service resource centre) is one of relatively few whose services are partly funded by governments, and even we rely on donors and events for more than 25% of our revenue, which is on the high side for our sector. Is there a venue, or venues, in which some impact mitigation conversations could take place with the Province?**

A: Both the federal and provincial government have announced programs that may assist. BC government site has a few links that are relevant:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/business/small-business/resources/covid-19-supports>

<https://www.bcartscouncil.ca/funding/covid-19-updates-and-faq/>

Federal government:
<https://covid.smallbusinessbc.ca/hc/en-us>

<https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/funding/information-covid-19.html>

The Province is working to complement its programs with what the federal government is offering and to fill any identified gaps.

6. What is the process for accessing the spaces secured for vulnerable people to self-isolate? Particularly in the Downtown Eastside.

A: More information will be available the week of April 27.

Board Voice

7. [An article from the Toronto Star](#) raises the concerns of COVID outbreaks in congregate care facilities for people with intellectual disabilities, brain injuries, etc. What are we doing, and what do we need to be doing, to ensure that other congregate-care facilities and arms-length facilities such as home-shares don't become COVID hot spots the way long-term care facilities have been?

A: Dr. Behn Smith noted that long-term care facilities can house up to 100 residents so larger outbreaks more likely, as opposed to group homes which may house up to a maximum of 10 residents. As well, the people most at risk of severe cases of COVID-19 are the elderly.

The revised testing guidelines now also prioritize testing of residents and workers in congregate settings such as shelters and group homes.

BC CEO Network (April 7)

8. 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.

Ross Chilton and Brenda Gillette had another meeting with Ministry of Health officials on April 21 and were advised that the Ministry of Health would not be proceeding with inspections at this time; but advised that WorkSafeBC may still do some. The Ministry of Health would also not

be looking to re-licence in light of need to adapt services.

- 9. 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. Wondering if there can be some stories about workers going to work not because they have been declared "essential" but because they care about their work and the people they support.**

A Members had a good discussion and offered many suggestions, including asking Minister Simpson to write a media statement or op-ed in appreciation of essential workers in the community social services sector. It was recognized by all that workers were doing their job because of their dedication and not because they "had to". Members were encouraged to share their recognition ideas with Ryan.Anderson@gov.bc.ca

Federation

- 10. Can we get clarification on why organizations are now being told to request PPE through a central hub when previously we were told to find our own answers?**

A: The COVID-19 pandemic has caused global supply chain disruptions and has resulted in extremely high demand for critical supplies like personal protective equipment or PPE (e.g. N95 masks, nitrile gloves) and sanitation supplies (e.g. sanitizer, disinfectant wipes). The Province is doing everything possible to bolster BC's supply of these critical supplies to ensure those fighting the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic have the supplies they need.

The provincial PPE framework prioritizes the health care system and provides guidance on help guide health care providers in determining what type of PPE individuals working or visiting in health care settings will receive dependent on supply levels. At this time, the distribution of available PPE supplies is limited to the health care system.

Every effort needs to be made employ risk mitigation strategies to reduce the need for these critical supplies, including: following any guidance on the appropriate use of PPE from the Office of the Provincial Health Officer and the BC Centre for Disease Control, PPE conservation, using appropriate PPE alternatives, reducing service levels, engineering

approaches (e.g. plexiglass barriers), and changes in operational requirements where possible.

Direction on personal protective equipment (PPE) processes from Health or Health Authorities applies to contract agreements with those entities only. Due to global supply shortages, community social service providers should continue to try and source PPE if there are opportunities to do so.

The Province is also working on a PPE allocation framework outside the health care system that will guide the distribution of PPE if the supply situation allows for it. However, there is no guarantee when, or in what quantity, critical supplies will be available.