



**Submission to the Fair Wages Commission,
Government of British Columbia**

November 30, 2017

Introduction

Board Voice welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Fair Wage Commission as it considers the development of a plan concerning the raising of the minimum wage; recommendations addressing the discrepancy between the minimum wage and living wages, and recommendations around broader wage rates under the Employment Standards Regulation.

Ensuring no-one in BC lives below the poverty level is essential for personal, family and community well-being. The Commission also has the opportunity to present to the government perspectives of complementary nature. This would be with a goal of ensuring that alleviation of the inequity of wages and benefits for certain jobs are similarly addressed for other positions for those employed in the community and social services sector.

Board Voice is a network of board directors of community-based social service organizations from across the province. It was founded on the belief that board leadership is critical to supporting high-quality social services and to making our communities better places to live.

Board Voice represents 69 community-based social service organizations and roughly 700 individual board directors across BC providing services like daycare and early childhood development; mental health and addictions; family support and child protection; assisted housing and employment; community corrections and specialized programs for women, children, youth and seniors. As such, it brings the voice of board directors to decision makers to highlight shared beliefs and values, to bring community voice to community challenges, and to share the impact of policies on organizations and on citizens in communities across British Columbia.

Board Voice wishes to bring to the Commission's attention key factors in ensuring fair and equitable wages in the community and social services sector. The inequities impact not only the employees but also the individuals, families and communities served.

Fair Wages, Benefits and Sector Sustainability

Board Voice would be remiss if it didn't contextualize the input to the Commission within the broader context of the sector. Sustainability issues faced by community service agencies are at a critical point. Volunteer board members are increasingly challenged by the demands placed on their organizations without the capacity to effectively respond. There are many related issues, some difficult to overcome, and always taxing for hard-pressed community agencies trying to fulfil their responsibilities.

Of import to the work of the Commission are the differential wages and benefits paid to workers doing mostly the same work, but funded through a different provincial ministry. Community social services boards, in their fiduciary responsibilities, find this unacceptable and note that in many instances the allowable compensation is well below that of a living wage or wage parity with other public sector employers including the government itself, school boards and the health sector.

This is an injustice not only to employees in the sector but also to the clients with whom they work. These agencies are as critical to mitigating the challenges, of the clients served, as are education, health and government entities. Their employees are professionals, contributing to the wellbeing of those they serve.

They help support people to stay in their own homes, or in residences, keeping them engaged in communities. They work around the clock with street youth and homeless adults; they help victims of trauma; counsel children, parents and families. To attract and retain these professionals they need to be compensated in ways that reflect their value to the province.

The inequitable wages and benefits also mean that workers hired and trained by their agencies are recruited away to do the same work elsewhere. This is a drain on already precarious agency resources and creates ongoing service disruptions and poor service to people.

Background

To further illustrate the challenges, we share with the Commission a few points provided by a couple of member organizations – Family Services of Greater Vancouver and the Clements Centre Society, which serves the Cowichan region of Vancouver Island. Some instances are beyond the Commission focus but are examples of the challenges in wage equity and that improvements in one segment of the Commission's work will equally need attention in the broader sector.

- Recruitment – frontline staff – turnover and hardship issues for staff working - funding in many instances across the province is 'below the living wage rate' and is below \$20/hour for some roles (\$16.50 - \$19.31). It is difficult to employ and retain staff given housing, transport and living expenses. While the funding increase for the education sector is welcome, many employees of community social service organizations with the same training and job qualifications are leaving our sector to go to jobs, in other public sector organizations, with similar job descriptions but with better wage and benefit packages.
- Benefits – high costs in this area mean our workforce (especially at the lower portion of the wage scale) experience financial burdens to become regular staff because of pension and benefit (co-pay) costs. Employees who are making \$18 / hour prefer to stay casual or hourly.
- Recruitment for professional staff such as social workers, physical, occupational, and speech therapists - we pay less and are funded for less per full time equivalent (FTE) than other sectors (health care) – we are not competitive on wages/benefits. As well, there is no funding for things like qualifications differential (pay more for BA/Masters).
- Wages/benefits for front line staff – simply put, we are not competitive. Also, there are inequities in funding parameters such as the shift differentials (working nights/weekends) – people working in residential facilities are paid less when residents are sleeping, but the work complexities are frequently the same regarding client needs.
- Staff development/training – we are not funded for training, development, and continuing education costs for staff (especially challenging for our professional, registered staff such as Registered Social Workers and Registered Clinical Counselors, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech and language pathologists who require continuing education to register annually with their professional bodies).

- Leadership and management staff – our salaries are not competitive. We pay \$10-\$20K less for manager and director roles vs other government/public sector roles (health for example, with whom we are often competing with for applicants). The sector faces difficulties recruiting seasoned frontline staff into management roles; we often have to structure roles creatively. We have great staff, who we train and mentor, who then get recruited into different parts of the public service. Organizations have to repost management roles 3-4 times (it often takes 6+ months to recruit) to try to garner qualified & interested candidates.
- Healthy workplace – the opioid and addiction crisis coupled with the rising acuity of mental health issues in the client populations we serve translates to increasing stress, mental health, addiction and compassion fatigue issues for staff – it takes leadership training, recognition, professional development and other things (not currently in our funding agreements with our funders) to help support staff in stressful work environments and again, some staff (hourly and casual) don't have sick pay or health benefits to help assist in a time of acute crisis.
- The chart below is illustrative of the differentials in the Cowichan region, and reflects the context across the province:

Community Social Services Employers Association April 2017	School District No. 79 Cowichan	Island Health
Adult/youth/child worker \$17.12 – 19.93 per hour 4 step grid based on number of hours (0 to 6001 onwards)	Student support worker: base wage \$28.15	Mental health support worker casual employment \$21.85 – 23.69 per hour
Physiotherapist \$29.50 – 34.40	Not available	Physiotherapist \$33.14 – 41.35
Occupational therapist \$29.50 – 34.40	Not available	Occupational therapist \$33.14 – 41.35
Speech-language pathologist \$29.50 – 34.40	Not available	Speech-language pathologist \$32.39 – 40.40

As board directors, we and others have addressed concerns with the Community Social Services Employer Association (CSSEA) before. Concerns date back to at least 1999. We have been told that wage parity will be achieved by 2019. However, the employee groups and unions in the education and healthcare sectors will be entering into negotiations and seeking higher wages and benefits. As a result, the community social service sector continually lags behind.

Call for a BC Social Policy Framework

The Fair Wages Commission is, of course, one of the processes underway as the BC Government undertakes its priorities. Board Voice wishes to draw to the Commission's attention the call for a framework.

At its highest level, the call for an overarching framework of principles and values, social goals, roles and accountabilities intended to provide direction to all social ministries and their funded agencies and organizations with a goal of better outcomes for people. It would also outline and processes for monitoring progress.

A Framework would provide:

- A lens for reviewing programs, policy, legislation, and mandates
- A strategic planning and priority setting tool
- A model for engagement and transparency
- A common language and vision to collectively set our sights on
- And a renewed call to action on innovation, collaboration, and outcomes.

Board Voice has been actively tilling the soil across BC with respect to this idea over the past four years. First, we canvased agency boards, then municipal councils and other organizations. In 2014, the Union of BC Municipalities passed a resolution supporting a consultation process on this idea. This year, the BC Chamber of Commerce passed a motion of support for a social policy framework brought forward by the Surrey Board of Trade.

Over this past year, Board Voice has been talking to British Columbians across the province about the kind of community they want for their future. The findings from this consultation were released this month. We urge the Commission to consider the values that emerge as a reference for recommendations. You will find the report appended to this submission.

Concluding Comment

Board Voice urges the Commission to consider the challenges of the Community and Social Services organizations as raised by the volunteer members of the respective Boards. The work on a minimum wage; recommendations addressing the discrepancy between the minimum wage and living wages; and recommendations around broader wage rates under the Employment Standards Regulation are of vital import. We urge the Commission to additionally attend to a goal of ensuring that alleviation of inequity of wages and benefits for specific jobs are similarly addressed for other positions for those employed in the community and social services sector.

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Alcohol and Drug
Services
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Ajit Sinha
Abbotsford Community
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Jody Dudley
Nelson Community
Services
Board Voice Director

Board Voice Member Agencies

Abbotsford Community Services
Abbotsford, BC

AiMHi – Association for Community Living
Prince George, BC

Artemis Place Society
Victoria, BC

An Association Advocating for Women and Children
Prince George, BC

BC Association of Community Response Networks
Surrey, BC

BC Council for Families
Vancouver, BC

BC Schizophrenia Society
Prince George, BC

Boundary Family and Individual Services
Grand Forks, BC

The Bridge Youth and Family Services
Kelowna, BC

Burnaby Family Life
Burnaby, BC

Cariboo Action Training Society
Prince George, BC

Cariboo Family Enrichment Centre Society
100 Mile House, BC

Cook Street Village Centre
Victoria, BC

The Children's Foundation
Vancouver, BC

Clements Centre Society
Duncan, BC

Community Living Victoria
Victoria, BC

Community Options Society
Duncan, BC

Community Social Planning Council
Victoria, BC

Cowichan Hospice Society
Duncan, BC

The Cridge Centre for the Family
Victoria, BC

Crisis Prevention, Intervention and Information Centre
Prince George, BC

Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver
New Westminster, BC

Family Services of Greater Vancouver
Vancouver, BC

Family Services of Greater Victoria
Victoria, BC

Foster Parent Support Services Society
Victoria, BC

Fraserside Community Services Society
Victoria, BC

Greater Vancouver Community Services Society
New Westminster, BC

Greater Vancouver Community Services Society
Vancouver, BC

Greater Victoria Citizens' Counselling Centre
Victoria, BC

Growing Together Child and Parent Society
Duncan, BC

Intersect Youth and Family Services Society
Prince George, BC

John Howard Society of the Lower Mainland
Vancouver, BC

John Howard Society of the North Island
Campbell River, BC

Kamloops Society for Alcohol and Drug Services
Kamloops, BC

Kelowna Community Resources Society
Kelowna, BC

Kootenay Boundary Community Services Cooperative
Nelson, BC

Nelson Community Services
Nelson, BC

North Okanagan Youth and Family Services Society
Vernon, BC

North Peace Community Resources Society
Fort St. John, BC

Options Community Services
Surrey, BC

Pacific Community Resources Society
Vancouver, BC

Penticton and District Community Resources
Penticton, BC

PLEA Community Services Society
Vancouver, BC

Port Alberni Association for Community Living
Port Alberni, BC

Port Alberni Family Guidance Association
Port Alberni, BC

Powell River Child, Youth and Family Services
Powell River, BC

Providence Farm
Duncan, BC

Pinky Lake Wilderness Camp Society
Williams Lake, BC

Sea-to-Sky Community Services Society
Squamish, BC

Squamish Helping Hands Society
Squamish, BC

Sunshine Coast Community Services
Sechelt, BC

Terrace & District Community Services
Terrace, BC

Valley Integration to Active Living Society
Duncan, BC

Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre
Vancouver, BC

Victoria Cool Aid Society
Victoria, BC

Contact Information

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