



Policy Watch

We have our eye on a number of emerging/ongoing issues, but one of the most difficult is the negotiated wage increase for unionized employees in our sector.

As summarized by the Federation's Rick FitzZaland in last week's webinar, the lift for unionized workers is 14.4 per cent, compared to 2.25 per cent for non-unionized workers. Adding to difficulties, BC's Low Wage Redress fund will be available only to unionized workers in unionized agencies. Aside from the obvious unfairness of all this, these changes will make it even more difficult for non-union organizations to hold onto staff, particularly in sought-after professions.

One webinar participant from the North noted that the top of the union wage scale for a counsellor has jumped more than \$5 an hour with this lift. Her non-unionized agency struggles to find counsellors at the best of times, having recently had one vacancy open for 18 months.

Ministries are telling agencies that they will work with them individually to try to mitigate the growing wage inequity contract by contract, but Rick stresses that the overall policy needs to be attacked.

Please take this issue to your MLA. Write letters, write opinion pieces, make some noise! Board Voice is working on an opinion piece on this issue that can be adapted by members to share with their community media.

What you need to know...

Board Voice is actively involved in advocacy efforts for issues facing our sector including open procurement, EHT and wage inequities. But we're also monitoring a number of other issues that could require advocacy depending on further development.

On open procurement, the recent WorkBC contract awards demonstrate that current procurement processes disfavour our sector and community connection overall by not taking into account factors such as community knowledge, past experience and reinvestment of profit back into community. With the next round of Child Care Referral and Resource centre contracts now going to open procurement and rumblings of other contracts going that way in the future, we must act now to address that.

Rick at FCSSBC will be spending most of his time on **the wage-inequity issue**. We will support the Fed wherever we can on in this effort with our own advocacy. Board Voice co-chair Leslie Welin and I are hoping to have a meeting with Finance Minister Carole James next month to talk about how government views our sector – as important community partner or interchangeable service provider?

Home support is another concern.

The decision to return home support services to BC health authorities came as a major surprise to our members who provide these services. It raises concerns about plans for the Better At Home program and other home support services our agencies provide to clients with specific needs (survivors of brain injury, for instance). Changes happened without consultation, despite significant financial impact on providers and deepening administrative challenges.

As WorkBC contracts shift to new providers April 1, please keep us informed as you see the impact on your communities and departing employees. Are there changes in wages? Are you being approached by new providers to give services "free" to job seekers with work barriers? (That's already happened in one community!) Are job seekers able to find what they need from the incoming contractors? An ongoing watch is vital, especially in communities with new providers.

Let's connect! Look for Board Voice on these social media platforms:



Queries, questions, concerns, ideas:

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