

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



Social Services Sector Roundtable COVID-19 Communique April 14, 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 spoke to federal/provincial/territorial meeting of ministers responsible for disability and vulnerable people that he attended via teleconference on April 14. He said it was valuable to learn about what was happening in other jurisdictions. Minister Simpson talked about the important role the community social services sector was playing. Please let him know if there are topics the sector would like him to raise with provincial and federal counterparts. On the call, the federal government recognized that they may need to adjust the emergency response benefit moving forward.

- Minister Simpson said there continues to be discussions with the Ministry of Finance about recruitment and retention funding needed for the community social services sector and will keep roundtable members updated.
- Minister Simpson also noted there were significant discussions within government about the Downtown Eastside and other communities in B.C. with entrenched homelessness.

Key Information

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>

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 note that epidemiologically that B.C.'s curve has flattened and that now is a very important time to “hold the line” and to continue with the existing public health measures of (1) physical distancing, (2) hand washing and (3) disinfection and enhanced cleaning protocols.

Testing

- Given the increase in testing capacity and new testing guidelines released April 8, there may be an “artificial” bump in the number of new cases. The best numbers to look at, in tracking the course of the epidemic are the hospitalization numbers.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- The Province continues to try to bolster B.C.'s supplies of personal protective equipment; however, not in a position yet to allocate supplies beyond formal health care settings.
- Important to remember that when a COVID-19 case is confirmed that the local medical health officers do detailed contact tracing and provide the appropriate guidance on a case-by-case basis.

Clarifications

- In response to questions, Dr. Behn Smith clarified that the order issued April 10th does not apply to any group homes or facilities operated by the community social services sector. (Facility Staff Assignment Order: <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-order-long-term-care-facility-staff-assignment.pdf>)
- The updated testing guidelines (April 8th) also apply to staff, not just clients, in congregate settings such as shelters or group homes. (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)
- 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

SSSR Member Questions.

BC CEO Network (April 7)

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. Ross Chilton and Brenda Gillette met with Ministry of Health representatives last week about licensing operations when set up in emergency locations. Ministry of Health is doing some work and will report back. Ross and Brenda will update the roundtable on the outcome.

Federation of Community Social Services of B.C. (April 7)

2. 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 There continues to be ongoing discussions in government and with the Ministry of Finance. SSSR member will be updated once decisions have been made.

3. 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 Provincial government staff will follow up and provide an answer next week.

CUPE (April 14)

4. Could we please get specific recommendations for PPE or safety protocols for the Social Services Sector? Workers in this sector are working closely with high risk clients who may not understand physical distancing or practice it and staff are providing close personal care over long periods of time to clients.

A: The Office of the Provincial Health Officer distributed guidance for the social services sector on April 4

Link to 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>

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

A: The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is working closely with BC Housing and local health authorities on a referral process for individuals who may need to self isolate. BC Housing has identified sites in 11 communities.