

A message from

Honourable

Shane Simpson

Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction



Social Services Sector Roundtable COVID-19 Communique Week of March 30, 2020

ATTENDING MEMBERS:

Minister Shane Simpson (Chair)
BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres
BC CEO Network
Board Voice Society of BC
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 emphasized the need to communicate regularly with the sector on the issues arising during the COVID-19 pandemic and to work together on finding solutions to challenges faced by the sector.
- The Social Services Sector Roundtable (SSSR) and the Re-imagining Community Inclusion (RCI) Steering Committee will each hold weekly meetings during the COVID pandemic, with union representatives joining the SSSR meetings going forward.
- On April 2, Minister Simpson announced that people on income assistance and disability assistance who are not receiving federal employment insurance benefits, would be receiving an automatic \$300-

month COVID-19 crisis supplement during the months of April, May and June.

- He also announced that people currently on income assistance and disability assistance receiving federal Employment Insurance (including the new Canada Emergency Response Benefit) would have those benefits fully exempted from their provincial assistance.
- Members agreed to provide a regular communique to share important information arising at this time with the broader sector, including health related information provided by Dr. Behn Smith, as it becomes available. This is the first in the series.

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

COVID-19 Ethical Decision-Making Framework

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/ethics_framework_for_covid_march_28_2020.pdf

Provincial Health Officer (PHO) Update

Richmond/Vancouver Group Home Cases

- PHO is aware of a few reported cases of COVID-19 in group homes.
- Local Health Officers responded to these situations and are experts on cluster identification and spread of disease and are working with group homes to address the current cases of COVID-19.
- OPHO is looking for ways to ensure effective communication with community-based organizations regarding COVID-19.

Testing Availability

- Testing capacity has increased but the demand for testing remains high.
- PHO is revising the current guidelines for testing but will still need to be strategic about the way they test for COVID-19.
- Dr. Behn Smith will update the roundtable next week on the new guidelines.

Supplies

- Dr. Behn Smith reiterated that COVID-19 is transmitted through droplets and cannot hang in the air. Due to this, masks are most

effective when used by people already infected with COVID as a preventative measure to control their spread of the virus. Surface cleaning is also paramount.

- Dr. Behn Smith is advocating for supplies for the social services sector outside of their direct health care needs, but due to current demand, Health Care is still receiving the bulk of supplies, as a priority.
- The PHO is in the process of determining a hierarchy of supply needs for if/when more supplies become available and social services sector needs are expected to be prioritized.
- Due to current limited testing capabilities and stress on our supplies, Dr Behn Smith recommended that the most important preventative measures that everyone can use are still hygiene and physical distancing. It will be important for everyone to continue focusing on these strategies.

SSS Practice Guidance document

Released April 4, 2020

- <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/current-health-topics/covid-19-novel-coronavirus>
- Posted under 'Guidance':
<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>

Single Facility Restrictions for Health Workers

- The PHO has exempted community-based social services sector from the single site restriction order to acknowledge the implications it would have for continuing services in the sector.
- Recommend minimizing travel between sites and interactions between locations to decrease potential for contamination.

Appendix 1: Questions & Answers

Q: There are concerns about not testing individuals who enter group homes for the first time or after being in a hospital. Will there be any updates to the testing guidelines to address this?

A: Current guidelines state that only individuals who are symptomatic, hospitalized, health care workers or part of a cluster investigation are tested. Testing guidelines are being reviewed on April 1st and will be amended based on the province's increased testing capacity and changing needs. The test is not used in asymptomatic individuals, because in that situation it can frequently give false negative results.

Q: If agencies have questions or a positive case is identified who do we contact?

A: Dr. Behn Smith will follow up with the PHO to determine the most efficient way to get connected locally and will report back to the SSSR on this. When an individual tests positive for COVID-19, the local medical health officers will contact the individual and begin contact tracing. The local will notify any individuals who had high-risk exposures with that individual and direct them on what to do.

Q: Will there be "incentive pay" available to employees working during the COVID-19 outbreak?

A: The Public Sector Employers' Council Secretariat advised that they are not currently looking at "incentive pay" but are paying attention to staffing levels and whether extra resources will be needed.