



Background

The Community Social Services Sector Innovation and Sustainability Roundtable Protecting services for individuals and families in British Columbia

Community social services agencies provide vital services to a wide range of vulnerable individuals and families in British Columbia, including:

- people with developmental disabilities
- people with physical disabilities
- people with multiple barriers
- children and youth
- women and families
- victims of crime
- people in conflict with the law
- Aboriginal people
- immigrants

Overall, the Community Social Services Sector has more than 12,000 contracts with government. These are for both union and non-union employers.

In February 2014, employers represented by the Community Social Services Employers' Association (CSSEA) and unionized employees represented by the Community Social Services Bargaining Association (CSSBA) ratified a new five-year agreement. As part of this agreement, a commitment was made to work together with government to address the longer-term sustainability of the community social services sector.

Why this is important

Government funders, the union, and employers agree that innovation and action are needed to sustain services and preserve positive outcomes for vulnerable individuals and families.

While wage increases under the new agreement are funded, it is understood that budgets for services and other costs will not increase substantially for the foreseeable future. Meanwhile the demand for services is growing.

It is also recognized that there are important considerations, such as statutory frameworks and Collective Bargaining Agreements that cannot be changed.

This is a sector with a history of innovation and there are opportunities to coordinate service delivery, reduce administrative costs and free resources for value-added service, simplify and coordinate contracting and reporting measures, and partner to leverage new sources of investment.

The first step

As a first step in addressing the commitment to work towards the long-term sustainability of the sector, a group of about fifty representatives from funding ministries, CSSEA and the union, and employers held a roundtable discussion on **April 24-25**.

Backgrounder

To ensure that these discussions are well informed, open and transparent, front-line service providers were invited to participate and provide feedback. Because of the sheer number of agencies in the sector, the service providers that were invited are agencies that reflect the full range of social services provided in the sector.

These included larger and smaller agencies, union/non-union, private/non-profit and Aboriginal agencies from across the province. These are on-the-ground service providers who face the same challenges as any agency, and the intent was to ensure that this first step had the perspective of front-line service providers and employers.

The discussions identified the potential changes needed to sustain services into the future and touched on topics such as:

- service coordination and integration
- simplified contracting and procurement
- effective community-based partnerships
- recruitment and retention of a viable workforce across the sector.

It is important to note that the roundtable discussion generated and explored many ideas and opportunities for action. Many of these ideas will require further development and consultation. Some may not ultimately prove to be feasible.

Going forward

The next steps involve the development of an action plan with input from the broader sector over the coming months in order to affect initial change within fiscal 2015/16. Work arising through the initiative will include the opportunity for engagement with families and agencies in the sector.

It is critical to develop a shared understanding and commitment to innovation and action, in and between government and the service delivery sector, to best ensure a sustainable sector.