

The Negative Impact of the Community Social Service Employer Association Collective Agreement on the Recruitment and Retention of Therapists in British Columbia

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Issue

There is a shortage of therapists in British Columbia and their recruitment and retention has been negatively impacted by the 2004 collective agreement bargained by the Community Social Service Employer's Association (CSSEA).

The CSSEA agreement contradicts other Provincial initiatives to recruit and retain therapists including the specific funding of a Provincial Consultant for Pediatric Therapists who:

focuses on developing strategies and advising the ministry on how to recruit and retain pediatric therapists who work with infants and young children with disabilities or delays. The consultant's goals are to:

- increase the ability to recruit and retain these professionals
- address waitlists and caseloads, and
- ensure professional development opportunities are available to meet the complex needs of children

The shortage of therapists and the negative impact of the CSSEA agreement is affecting the provision of early childhood development services in CSSEA organizations such as the Cowichan Valley Association for Community Living.

Recommendations

The Province use its representatives on the CSSEA board to initiate a Job Evaluation Process which incorporates a market rate adjustment for the recruitment and retention of therapists. The expected result is to move therapists onto a higher wage grid level that insures parity for paediatric therapists working in equivalent positions regardless of the employing agency's bargaining unit, CSSEA or HEABC.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) commits to funding CSSEA agencies to reflect the higher wages of these paramedical professionals.

Background

Comparison for equivalent positions such as at the Duncan child development center.

	CSSEA	HEABC
OT/PT	\$19.98 - \$23.50	\$27.39 - \$34.17 (grid level 9, schedule B)
SLP	\$21.68 - \$25.50	\$27.23 - \$33.96 (grid level 11, schedule A) \$28.25 - \$35.24 (grid level 12, schedule A)

The new CSSEA collective agreement lowers starting wages to \$19.98 per hour for physiotherapists and occupational therapists, a reduction of 15% plus significant reductions in benefits. The starting wage which had been \$3.89 per hour below HEABC has now dropped to \$7.41 per hour below HEABC plus a large difference in benefit packages. A similar situation exists for speech pathologists. For example, HEABC members receive employer paid medical, CSSEA members pay 1.6% for that benefit. HEABC members participate in the Municipal Pension Plan, CSSEA members in Duncan receive a 3% employer contribution to their RRSP. A disturbing change within the context of retention is the reduction of sick benefits within an industry undergoing staffing shortages and increasing waitlists which historically have led to increased employee illness. Indeed in Duncan, one therapist has already resigned citing increased caseload and stress related issues.

The majority of child development centres in the province are represented by Health Employer's Association of British Columbia (HEABC) while a few centers are represented by CSSEA. The decision of whether an organization was represented by HEABC or CSSEA was historically based on where the majority (51%) of an organization's funding originated; if health then HEABC, if other ministries, then CSSEA. In the 1990's, most early intervention services were funded by Ministry of Health and therefore most child development centers fell under HEABC. In certain cases such as in Duncan, where the organization was multi-service, the majority of services were social care and CSSEA became the employer's representative.

In HEABC, therapist wages and benefits followed the Health Care trend, and moved higher. In the last round of bargaining for 2001 - 2004, the Provincial Government legislated a settlement which provided a general wage increase of approximately 6% and recognized the difficulties in recruitment and retention of some specialties including physiotherapy and occupational therapy and awarded a market rate adjustment of an additional 8%. This increased the already existing wage gap between HEABC and CSSEA child development centers.

In 2004 bargaining, the CSSEA mandate from the Provincial Government was to lower wage and benefit costs. This directive appears to have been mainly to the community living and general social services sectors where the Ministry of Children and Family Development was undergoing significant budget pressures. In contrast, in the area of early childhood child development, the Province increased funding by \$50 million to \$348 million (January 26, 2004 Premier's Letter to Minister Linda Reid).

There appears to be an inconsistency in provincial approaches to therapists. On the one hand, the Province recognizes the shortage of therapists both by legislating a HEABC collective agreement which provided significant market rate adjustments, and by funding a recruitment and retention advisor to help alleviate the shortage. On the other hand, the CSSEA board with Provincial representatives supported a collective agreement which significantly lowered wages and benefits.

Background on the CSSEA agreement

Starting wages lowered to 85% of existing wage grid.

Benefit changes effective April 1, 2004

- payment of 1.6% of gross wages to Medical Service Plan premiums
- significant reduction in disability insurance coverage
- reduction in sick time from 1.5 days per month to 1.0 days per month
- cancellation of weekly indemnity coverage
- increase from 15 to 20 hours per week for benefit coverage

Background on 2001 – 2004 HEABC agreement (2004 still in bargaining)

April 1, 2001 general wage increase of 2%

October 1, 2001 market adjustment for physiotherapist and occupational therapist of 2%

April 1, 2002 general wage increase of 2%

April 1, 2002 market adjustment for physiotherapist and occupational therapist 2%

April 1, 2003 general wage increase of 1.5% or COLA

April 1, 2003 market rate adjustment for physiotherapist and occupational therapist 4%

Duncan comparison											
physio and occupational	2000/2001 wage grid	April 1, 2004 wage grid						March 31, 2006 wage grid (increase effective last day of contract)			
		0 - 2000 hours	2001-4000 hours	4000-6000 hours	6000 hours +			0 - 2000 hours	2001-4000 hours	4000-6000 hours	6000 hours +
CSSEA	\$23.50	\$19.98	\$21.15	\$22.33	\$23.50			\$21.15	\$22.77	\$24.04	\$25.30
HEABC		\$27.39	\$28.78	\$30.06	\$31.43	\$32.69	\$34.17				
		1st year	2nd year	3rd year	4th year	5th year	6th year				
April 1, 2003 wage grid level 9 schedule B											
speech pathologist	2000/2001 wage grid	April 1, 2004 wage grid						March 31, 2006 wage grid (increase effective last day of contract)			
		0 - 2000 hours	2001-4000 hours	4000-6000 hours	6000 hours +			0 - 2000 hours	2001-4000 hours	4000-6000 hours	6000 hours +
CSSEA	\$25.50 \$28.00	\$21.68	\$22.95	\$24.23	\$25.50			\$23.26	\$24.62	\$25.99	\$27.36
HEABC		\$27.23	\$28.58	\$29.88	\$31.25	\$32.50	\$33.96				
		\$28.25	\$29.69	\$31.03	\$32.44	\$33.72	\$35.24				
		1st year	2nd year	3rd year	4th year	5th year	6th year				
April 1, 2003 wage grid level 11 and 12 schedule A											