



BC's Union for Professionals

Date: January 12, 2022

Honourable Adrian Dix
Minister of Health
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Via email: HLTH.Minister@gov.bc.ca

To the Honourable Minister Dix,

Re: Request for a meeting with the Professional Employees Association

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission on the topic of retention and recruitment of public sector physiotherapists who are members of our Health Science Professionals chapter.

Introduction

The Professional Employees Association (PEA) is BC's union for professionals. We were formed in 1974 to represent licensed professionals employed in the BC Public Service. Since that time, we have grown to support over 2,800 members in a wide range of professions in the education, legal and health care sectors. More than 90 per cent of our members work in the public sector.

Members in our Health Science Professionals (HSP) chapter work in community settings for regional health authorities and include physiotherapists, pharmacists, psychologists, and public health engineers.

Background: Recruitment and Retention Issues

The compensation of BC physiotherapists severely lags in comparison to other jurisdictions and continues to cause recruitment and retention issues across the province. Interprovincial comparisons provided by the Health Employers Association in 2021, show that BC physiotherapists are fourth when it comes to compensation and behind Alberta, Ontario and Newfoundland. There is also a 13 per cent compensation differential between physiotherapists in BC and those in Alberta. Housing and the cost of living in BC is high relative to the rest of Canada.



BC's Union for Professionals

With such low compensation, health authorities experience continual difficulties in recruiting physiotherapists into vacant positions. It is not uncommon for job postings for physiotherapists to sit unfilled for months or years at a time.

One of the main reasons for these unfilled jobs is that physiotherapists can go into private practice for significantly more pay, work schedule flexibility and increased independence and autonomy. Public sector jobs do not appeal to experienced physiotherapist professionals or new graduates, based purely on the compensation differentials between private and public jobs. It is not uncommon for less than 10 per cent of new physiotherapy grads to go into public sector jobs each year.

Between 2012 and 2016, 50 per cent of physiotherapists worked in the public sector. Since then, that number has steadily decreased to 33 per cent. In 2020, there were approximately 760 more physiotherapists working in BC than there were in 2015, but 333 fewer physiotherapists working in the public sector. These numbers show how unattractive public sector jobs are for new physiotherapists.

What's more, approximately 45 per cent of current HSP physiotherapists are approaching retirement and so health authorities are on the brink of facing a mass exodus of experienced members who provide critical services to British Columbians.

HSP physiotherapists have provided essential service during the pandemic, some pivoting to offering virtual services to clients while others continued to offer in-house visits. The services they offer are critically important to the well-being of BC's citizens.

Recommendations

BC needs to increase the number of new graduates hired into the public sector. The government needs to look at creative solutions such as:

- student loan forgiveness;
- recruitment and retention bonuses;
- subsidized education and government sponsored recruitment programs;
- and
- part-time opportunities.



BC's Union for Professionals

These recommendations were outlined in the 2021 Provincial Allied Health Engagement Summary Report and could help attract recent graduates and not only fill many longstanding vacancies but also help prepare health authorities for the impending retirement of physiotherapists.

The engagement report also outlined that competitive wages, benefits and flexible work schedules are the key issues with respect to retention. Furthermore, the report confirmed that those in the public sector are much more likely considering leaving their current position than those in the private sector.

To address these recruitment and retention issues, the BC government needs to ensure a competitive compensation structure for health professionals in order to enable quality health care. BC needs a flexible public sector bargaining mandate that supports the professionals who provide critical services to the people, resources, and economy of the province.

We are formally requesting a meeting with you to discuss these issues and review the recommendations proposed in this letter. Thank you for your attention to this important member issue, which was put forward at the last PEA Convention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Scott McCannell
Executive Director