



# RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT CHALLENGES

Professional Employees Association

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on Finance and Government Services

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**P|E|A**

BC's Union for Professionals

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## SUMMARY

Decades of wage increases below inflation and inflexible public sector mandates mean that public sector PEA members' wages dramatically lag compared to other labour markets.

PEA members across BC face the ever-increasing cost of living, including some of the highest real estate and rent costs in Canada. Public sector mandates have also created significant inequities across the public sector and caused morale challenges and difficulties in recruiting and retaining skilled professionals.

The continuation of restrictive wage increases calls into question the sustainability of quality public services in BC. Public sector professional compensations should support a sustainable professional presence in BC's public sector.

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## ABOUT THE PEA

The Professional Employees Association (PEA) is BC's union for professionals. The PEA was first certified in 1974 to represent licensed professionals employed in the BC Public Service. Since that time, we have grown to support a wide range of professionals in the education, legal and health care sectors. The professionals we represent are varied: foresters, lawyers, teachers, engineers, physiotherapists, psychologists, pharmacists, veterinarians, librarians, system administrators and more.

We represent more than 3000 professionals at the University of Victoria, the BC Public Service, the BC Oil and Gas Commission, St. Margaret's School, the Law Society of BC, Legal Aid BC, the Family Maintenance Agency, Okanagan Regional Library, the staff at the Hospital Employees' Union and community-based professionals in health authorities throughout BC.

Approximately 90% of our members work in the public sector and almost without exception, are proud of their efforts to provide quality, professional public services that promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of communities in BC.

## PEA RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION CHALLENGES

The following examples and context from PEA bargaining units demonstrate why the Government should provide future compensation mandates that address the significant gaps between PEA professional's compensation and relevant labour mandates that are more flexible.

### GOVERNMENT LICENSED PROFESSIONALS (GLP)

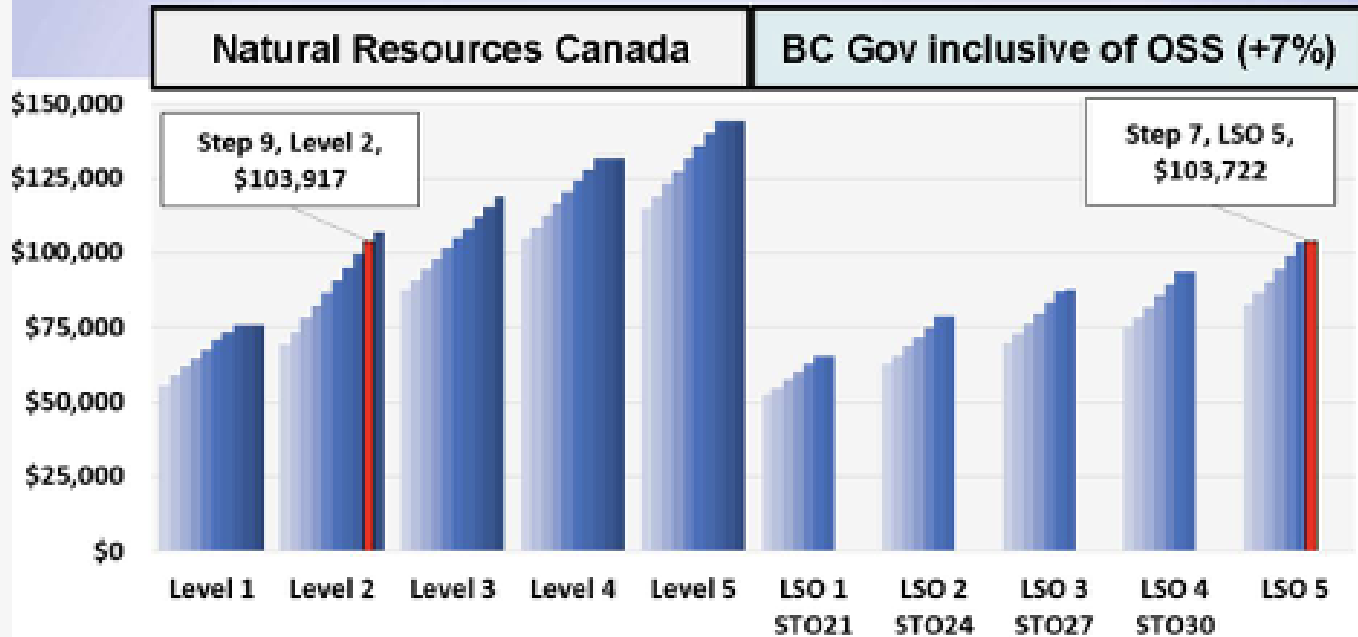
Over the years, the Public Service Agency and PEA have conducted various labour market studies. Regardless of methodology, the conclusions have been the same in that the licensed science officers working for the government are well behind most other provinces, the Federal Government and the private sector when it comes to compensation.

For example, management within the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations in May of 2020, provided the following PowerPoint slide. The slide shows that GLP members' pay is 24% lower than Federal Government scientists' rates of pay, even when a 7% overtime stipend is added to GLP rates.



Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations  
and Rural Development

## Research Scientist Pay Scale



**On Average 24% Lower than Federal Government**

In the last round of bargaining, extremely modest labour market adjustment increases were provided for PEA geologists (a total of 3% over three years) and engineers (a total of 1% over three years). We believe additional compensation enhancements for all professionals are needed for a sustainable public service that is able to provide crucial science-based expertise. This expertise is increasingly required in the face of turbulent and changing natural and social environments.

We regularly hear comments from senior bureaucrats and elected representatives that low compensation is a barrier to hiring needed professionals and that low compensation results in positions being vacant for years.

We would note as well, that in Evidence for Democracy's (E4D) recent report, Spotlight on Integrity: An update on the state of science in British Columbia, 49% of PEA members that responded to a 2020 survey feel like they lack sufficient resources to meet their Ministry's scientific mandates.

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PEA scientists identified hiring delays, lack of succession planning, and overreliance on professionals outside the government as core barriers to research capacity. E4D recommends that the province:

- Improve hiring practices and invest resources for personnel to fill outstanding vacancies and to increase support and technical staff for Ministries;
- Develop a framework for succession planning that includes measures for training of new employees and reduces hiring delays;
- Improve the competitiveness of hiring practices to attract qualified professionals, including by providing competitive wages; and
- Explore career laddering options to allow qualified scientific professionals to advance in their positions.

We are asking the government to support enhanced compensation for all government scientists and to action the E4D recommendations above.

Taking such an approach will prevent crisis-based responses to current and impending recruitment and retention challenges. Public Service Agency turnover data from the last round of PEA collective bargaining showed that the historical annual turnover rate was up to 67% for psychologists and 20% for foresters. This clearly demonstrates the need for further action.

In the last round of bargaining, the PEA proposed a process to explore revising existing compensation structures to allow for career laddering. This concept had been implemented and is a feature of the compensation structure at the Oil and Gas Commission where the PEA represents professionals. It was also recently introduced in 2020 as the Research Scientist Achievement Review Framework (RSARF) in the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development. The RSARF is an incumbent-based compensation review for Research Scientists in the ministry's Research Program. This review and classification process recognizes individual Research Scientists for their scientific achievement, research leadership and contributions to the ministry.

Career laddering enables employees to grow their professional, science-based expertise and experience. It can be integrated with existing performance assessment systems so that as professionals build competencies and contribute more to organizational priorities, their compensation can increase and is not locked into rigid classification levels. Career laddering has the potential to retain senior staff and provide incentives for continuing to enhance science-based expertise. The Oil and Gas Commission experience has been positive in regard to recruitment, retention and employee performance.

We also strongly encourage the government to fund and support the development of a robust career laddering system for government professionals. We believe this will benefit the province and our members.



We note that the Public Service Workplace engagement scores for 2020 demonstrate that public servants continue to be disillusioned with their wages and pay:

TABLE 1: ENGAGEMENT MODEL DRIVER RESULTS (AVERAGE SCORE OUT OF 100 POINTS)

	2020	2018	DIFFERENCE
<b>ENGAGEMENT</b>	68	68	0
<b>ENGAGEMENT CHARACTERISTICS</b>			
BC Public Service Commitment	70	70	0
Job Satisfaction	69	69	0
Organization Satisfaction	64	65	-1
<b>DRIVERS</b>			
Empowerment	69	69	0
Stress & Workload	63	62	1
Job Suitability	77	78	-1
Vision, Mission & Goals	66	65	1
Teamwork	80	79	1
Tools & Workspace	62	59	3
Recognition	64	63	1
Professional Development	64	64	0
Pay & Benefits	50	46	4
Staffing Practices	66	65	1
Respectful Environment	77	76	1
<b>MANAGEMENT PRACTICES</b>			
Executive-Level Management	61	59	2
Supervisory-Level Management	76	74	2

## HEALTH SCIENCE PROFESSIONALS

Similar to other parts of BC's public sector, the compensation of BC health professionals 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 compared to Alberta, Ontario and Newfoundland. There is also a 13% compensation differential between BC and Alberta. The province is ranked last overall in compensation for public service BC Psychologists are 27% behind both Alberta and Ontario. These wage gaps need to be addressed.

More than ever, health services need to be sustainably provided service. The pandemic has shown that PEA members working in public service health roles are critically important to the wellbeing of BC's citizens. The dedication that provincial pharmacists have shown to their profession this past year by providing vaccinations within BC communities is an indication of how much the province relies on these roles during times of crisis.

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Physiotherapists also have provided much-needed service during the pandemic, yet the public sector continues to have difficulty hiring new physiotherapy graduates because the pay difference between what these grads can make in a private clinic is too great. It is not uncommon for zero out of 80 new physiotherapy grads to go into public sector jobs each year.

Our members have experienced increasing and unsustainable workloads due to positions remaining vacant for years. As well, at a time when professional science-based knowledge and skills are at a premium, we are extremely concerned over the deskilling of professional work as our members' duties are increasingly assigned to professionals in other areas of practice or non-professionals.

To increase the number of new graduates hired into public service, the government needs to look at creative solutions such as student loan forgiveness, recruitment and retention bonuses, and part-time opportunities. These solutions could help attract more recent graduates and not only fill many long-standing vacancies but also help prepare the public service for the impending retirement of 45% of current Health Science Professional members.

We believe the government should ensure a competitive compensation structure for health professionals in the community in order to enable quality health care.

#### LEGAL AID BC AND FAMILY MAINTENANCE AGENCY

The PEA represents lawyers at Legal Aid BC (LABC) and the Family Maintenance Agency (FMA). Both LABC and FMA lawyers make only a fraction of what Crown Counsel lawyers are paid. FMA lawyers' wages are 50 per cent of what their counterparts in Crown Counsel earn. LABC lawyers make over a third less than their colleagues in Crown Counsel.

We are asking for consideration of additional funding and redress for the significant wage gap between FMA and LABC lawyers relative to Crown Counsel. This gap must be addressed as part of ensuring the important legal services our lawyers provide are sustainable in the long term for some of BC's most disadvantaged people.

#### CONCLUSION

Public sector members provide essential services to the province but restrictive wage increases are threatening the recruitment and retention of qualified professionals. BC needs a flexible mandate that supports the professionals who provide critical services to the people, resources, and economy of the province.