



BC ASSOCIATION *of*
SOCIAL WORKERS

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June 14, 2019

Honourable Adrian Dix, Minister of Health - adrian.dix.MLA@leg.bc.ca
Ms. Sonia Furstenaus, MLA for Cowichan Valley - sonia.furstenaus.MLA@leg.bc.ca
Mr. Norm Letnick, MLA for Kelowna-Lake Country - norm.letnick.MLA@leg.bc.ca

Dear Minister Dix, Ms. Furstenaus, and Mr. Letnick;

Re: Public Consultation on Regulating Health Professions, Steering Committee, Ministry of Health

Introduction:

The BC Association of Social Workers (BCASW) is pleased to provide comment on the pending revision of the Health Professions Act. We share the Steering Committee's aim to protect the public and to ensure high quality health care for British Columbians.

The BCASW is well-placed to provide consultation on this matter. Our Association has a lengthy history of advocating for the inclusion of social work in healthcare legislation. Social workers are employed in health settings across BC and ground their practice in a deep understanding of the social determinants of health.

Our Request:

Consultation with our Board members, regional Association branches and allied stakeholders leads us to request the opportunity to consult with both the Ministry of Children and Family Development and the Ministry of Health about where the profession of social work's goals and protection of the public interest can best be achieved. Our goals include strengthening professional social work through clear protection of title, mandatory registration with our professional college, statutory scope of practice, and accredited social work education. We ask for the opportunity to consult with both Ministries on how these goals can be best achieved through changes to legislation to increase public protection.

Who We Are:

The BC Association of Social Workers is a voluntary, not-for-profit membership association that supports and promotes the profession of social work and advocates for social justice. BCASW currently has nine branches and members in every region of the province. Our members work in many different and overlapping sectors including child welfare. The greatest number of members work in medical settings, mental health and substance use services, and in private counselling practices.

BCASW is one of nine provincial and territorial social work associations in partnership with the Canadian Association of Social Workers.

Our Association is led by a voluntary provincial Board made up of executive members, regional representatives, and a student representative. Members serve on various committees and communities of practice including Health Advocacy, Multicultural and Anti-Racism, Child Welfare, and Seniors Issues.

The BCASW's goals are:

- Promotion of the profession and practice of social work - Promote the knowledge, skills, and abilities of professional social workers and the diversity of social work practice to public, government, and nongovernmental organizations.
- Service to members – Provide valuable, supportive, and accessible resources and services that meet the needs and interests of members
- Advocacy, social justice – Promote health, social, and economic policy consistent with social work values, to ensure a just and compassionate society

Our Association works closely with the BC College of Social Workers, always recognizing our different mandates and responsibilities.

What We Do:

Social work is a profession concerned with helping individuals, families, groups, and communities to enhance individual and collective health and well-being. It aims to help people develop their skills and ability to use their own resources and those of the community to prevent and resolve problems. Social work is concerned with individual and personal problems, broader social issues, the protection of fundamental rights, and social justice.

Social work practice is based upon the profession's code of ethics, values, and principles. Using knowledge of human behaviour and social systems, social workers assist people in all stages of life to build strength and capacity. With knowledge of the interaction between human development and social, economic, and cultural factors; social workers work with people to manage life's challenges. Social workers' skills and interventions include assessment, problem-solving, counselling, teaching, skill building, conflict resolution, the creation and use of resources and treatment and support programs, advocacy, and research. We invite you to review two of our publications attached to this email which were prepared for distribution to health professionals and to members of the public.

- [*The Role of Social Workers on the Health Care Team*](#)
- [*Social Work Skills and Knowledge in Health Care*](#)

A Brief History of the Social Work Profession in British Columbia:

The BCASW has been involved in repeated efforts, alone and with other stakeholders, to modernize legislation to strengthen the profession and extend protection of the public interest. Below are some of the initiatives BCASW was directly involved in or has supported:

- 1956: BCASW was incorporated with the intent to speak with "one voice" on issues of importance to the profession.
- 1968: Prior to the Social Workers Act, social work in British Columbia was an unregulated profession. If a social worker or an unqualified person claiming to be a social worker behaved unethically, clients had nowhere to seek a remedy. The Act created the Board of Registration for Social Workers (BRSW) which had the authority to regulate social work in the public interest.
- 1995: *Protecting the Public: An Opportunity and a Risk* was presented to government as a joint initiative by the Board of Registration, BCASW, and staff of the Ministry of Social Services, the Health Professions Council, the BCGEU and "other important parties in the field of social work in British Columbia". This initiative proposed that the Social Workers Act be repealed and placed under the Ministry of Health as the "Health and Social Services Professions Act." The paper argued for protection of title, specialty practice recognition, and a statutory scope of practice statement.

- 1996: The Board of Registration separated from the BCASW because of their different mandates. Lobbying to the government continued for the creation of a College of Social Workers.
- 1997: A submission was made to government by BCASW and the Board of Registration. The paper was entitled *Establishing a College of Social Workers Under the Health Professions Act: Registration, Alternative Credentialing, Grandparenting, Maintaining Registration*. It was consistent with Gove's recommendation No. 47 "that the province broaden the mandate of the Health Professions Council to include Social Services, permitting the creation of a Professional College of Social Workers".
- 2006: The *Hughes' Report on Children and Youth* again recommended mandatory registration of social workers.
- 2008: The revised Social Workers Act established the BC College of Social Workers (BCCSW).
- 2013: The removal of the exemption from registration for social workers employed by regional health boards strengthened the regulatory framework. Those working for MCFD, in education, and for First Nations are still not required to register. Members of the public served by these groups have none of the protections that mandatory registration provides.
- 2015: The BCCSW implemented a mandatory quality assurance program and competency-based entry to practice licensure exams for new applicants for registration.
- 2018: BCASW met with MCFD Minister Conroy to discuss the recently broadened educational qualifications for child protection social workers which now allow MCFD to hire workers with no social work education. Consistent with the findings of Judges Gove and Hughes, this broadening of credentials puts the public at unnecessary risk.
- 2019: A joint working group was established with MCFD and tasked with protection of title, mandatory registration, scope of practice, and other matters. Other members of the working group are directors of BC's accredited schools of social work, the BC College of Social Workers, and the BC Government Service Employees' Union.

Through the Social Workers Act, the BCCSW controls the title, "Registered Social Worker" and "Registered Clinical Social Worker". Persons describing themselves as social workers generally must register with the College however the Act provides very little specific protection of the title "social worker". Significantly, regulations of the Act provide exemptions such that almost anyone engaged in the human service field may refer to themselves as a social worker. Those who work for public organizations such as the provincial and federal governments, and First Nations are not legally required to register with the BCCSW and may refer to themselves as social workers. Fortunately, some choose to register with the College making themselves publicly accountable.

Our attempts to ensure high quality social work services through protection of title and mandatory registration for all social workers have met with limited success.

Professional Goals and Principles:

Social work associations form one of the three Canadian intersectoral pillars of the profession; the other two being the regulatory colleges and the schools of social work. All three groups have a memorandum of understanding to collaborate on the following principles:

- The social work profession is committed to the fundamental goal of advancing human rights and social justice.
- All service users have the right to receive skilled and ethical social work services from a qualified social worker.
- The three sectors support registration for social workers in Canada.
- All three sectors support accredited social work education programmes.

Thank you for considering our request for consultation on inclusion in the Health Professions Act or continuation under the Social Workers Act. Our aim is to ensure high quality social work services and increased public protection.

Sincerely,



Michael Crawford, RSW
President, BC Association of Social Workers



Dianne Heath, RSW
Executive Director, BC Association of Social Workers

cc: Hon. Katrine Conroy, Minister, MCFD
Mr. Jim Campbell, President, BC College of Social Workers