

Members' Update on Campaign to Strengthen Professional Social Work in BC

September 2022

Our campaign to strengthen professional social work in British Columbia continues and we will soon call on members to work together to achieve a stronger profession.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development launched a consultation with their partners, social workers, and the public on oversight of the social work profession including what is working well and opportunities for improvement. I believe this consultation was launched as a direct result of the intense lobbying for changes to the Social Workers Act done by our staff and Board of Directors. You can find the details of this consultation on the govTogetherBC website.

This latest round of advocacy began when MCFD changed the educational requirements for child welfare workers in 2019 to include Bachelor of Arts graduates in almost any program including anthropology and theology. After an initial engagement, MCFD refused to discuss the changes and argued that they were required to address their recruitment and retention issues.

BCASW pivoted, put together a coalition including the BCGEU, the BC College of Social Workers, and directors of BC schools of social work, and began a series of discussions with MCFD aimed at changing the Social Workers Act to require mandatory registration for all social workers, full protection of title, and a legislated scope of practice. These discussions continued through to the spring of 2022 however, nothing substantial was gained and we were frustrated by MCFD's inability or unwillingness to discuss our profession beyond the boundaries of their ministry. As with almost all previous iterations of the campaign, we concluded, following much study and member consultation, that the regulation of our profession for the protection of the public interest would be best accomplished under the Ministry of Health. The Minister of Health oversees the regulation of more than two dozen health professions through the Health Professions Act.

The Minister of Health has advised that revisions to the Health Professions Act, following a review by Harry Cayton, will be introduced shortly after the BC Legislature resumes sitting in early October. The revisions create an oversight committee and we have been advised that the committee will be charged with the responsibility of determining where best to locate social work to best protect the public. They may choose to leave social work under MCFD or move our profession to Health.

MCFD has proven itself to be a poor steward of the Social Workers Act and the Minister, responsible for the administration of the act, maintains an exemption from the act for her own staff. In fact, MCFD is moving from a passive ignoring of the act to actively excluding the use of *social work* and *social worker* within their ranks.

Social work is much more than child welfare and health, is much more inclusive of the work we do. Our familiarity with the social determinants of health and their application to all areas of social work practice, make the move to the Health Professions Act a logical one. The Ministry of Health, over the past year, has reached out to BCASW asking for our expertise and involvement with the Publicly Funded Counselling Advisory Committee (expanding services), Employment and Labour Marketing Services (the role of social work in healthcare), the Select Standing Committee on Health (toxic illicit drug overdoses),

Provincial Health Care Social Work Working Group (competencies for BSW and MSW). The Doctors of BC also recently asked us to review their draft policy paper on reducing burdens.

This fall, you will hear directly from Advocacy Circle chair, Barb Keith and me, with an invitation to get involved in this campaign. We look forward to working with you to strengthen our profession.

Me7 xpem-kt re sellts' u7úwi-kt ("We will stitch our moccasins together " in Secwepemctsin, the language of the Indigenous people within Secwepemcúlcw where I live).

Michael Crawford, MSW, RSW, President
BC Association of Social Workers

For further information, please contact Michael Crawford at bcasw@bcasw.org.