

Social Services Sector Roundtable:

Priority Issues for Community-Based Agencies

Background

At the initial Social Services Sector Roundtable meeting on May 10, 2019, community-based organizations identified priority issues facing the social services sector. A summary of the priority issues discussed at this meeting is set out below.

Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment and retention were identified as the most pressing issues by most participants. In general, this issue was raised in the context of the need to address the broader relationship between the sector and government, but several specific concerns were raised.

- There is agreement that a long-term approach to these issues is important, and that to be successful, it will need to address multiple factors in a systematic way. Some of these are referenced in the Federation of Community Social Services' reports from past Social Policy Forums.
- In the immediate term, some participants stated that prompt action to address current inequities in compensation within the sector would demonstrate a commitment to the process.
- Specific concerns identified include:
 - Low wages, lack of pension, and lack of long-term financial supports for workers in the sector.
 - Insufficient training (specifically identified for the anti-violence sector).
 - A need for more services in every community generally, and more services and supports for violence against Indigenous women run by Indigenous women specifically, as well as extended trauma services/supports.
 - An urgent need to address the historic wage disparity between the Indigenous sector and others, and within the Indigenous contract sector.

Procurement and Contracting

Procurement is one of the highest profile indicators of the relationship with government and the community-based organizations want a rational and sector appropriate system of procurement and contracting. The procurement and contract management system needs to be part of a redefined relationship between government and the social services sector.

- Participants expressed frustration and confusion regarding the many differences in procurement and contracting practices from one ministry to another, and with other government-funded bodies (such as health authorities).

- Considerations for procurement and contracting included:
 - Reviewing, identifying, and adopting best practices from ministry processes already undertaken to improve procurement and contracting across government.
 - Sharing examples of how government defines 'success' in contracting.
 - Recognizing the value of community development, ongoing community impact, and long-term relationships within communities.
 - Focusing on desired outcomes of/for people being served by organizations.
 - Returning to Continuing Agreements.
 - Developing mechanisms for combining multiple contracts between a specific ministry and agency into single agreements for multiple services with those agencies.
 - Addressing specific needs for Indigenous organizations to be able to participate in the procurement process. This includes addressing the challenge for Indigenous service providers of the 'Indigenizing' of mainstream sectors, (colleges/universities/provincial gov't, non-profit housing, private sector) where this sector is attempting to use a freshly applied Indigenous lens in part, to obtain Indigenous specific funds.
 - Implementing quality standards for organizations moving to Indigenize, to prevent service delivery from modern re-colonizing of Indigenous non-profits and groups by a non-indigenous sector.

An ongoing relationship

As part of the improved relationship between government and the social sector, an ongoing forum for information, conversation, and issues management is required. This should include:

- Working with community-based organizations to develop a strategy aimed at moving social care out of multiple silos and instead viewing and sustaining it as an integrated provincial system managed in partnership with the community social services sector.
- Facilitated conversations either via roundtable or as committee/advisory work to identify the issues, barriers and solutions for improving and maintaining healthy and mutually beneficial relationships between government and community-based organizations as partners in the provision of social care to British Columbians.
- Addressing the other issues identified, such as recruitment and retention and procurement and contracting, in a manner that is open, fair and recognizes the pressures both in the community-based organizations and in government.

Sustainable Organizations

- Support service providers to offer innovative and creative services and to leverage their own assets, such as land, property, volunteers, or expertise.
- Provide funding support to Friendship Centres to participate in the frequent requests for analysis and advice from government ministries that are redesigning their programs and services for Indigenous people.