

COMMUNIQUE

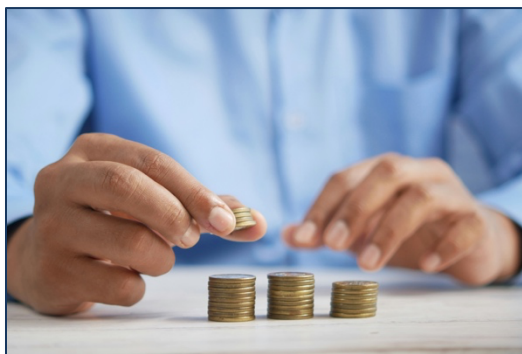
We Empower You To Make The Most Of Your Public Service Career

Pandemic Pay

Do you Deliver Front Line Services but Not In-Line for COVID Compensation?

May 2020

On May 19, 2020, the BC government announced a temporary pandemic pay program to support “health, social services and corrections employees delivering in-person, front-line care during the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes employees delivering a range of health and social services to



people most vulnerable to COVID-19, where maintaining physical distancing is difficult or impossible.”¹ The program is cost-shared with the federal government, which provides 75% of the funding. Excluded management staff are currently not eligible for this program.

The BC Excluded Employees' Association (BCEEA) strongly supports the intention of this program and welcomes the recognition it brings to the very real risk and hardships experienced by BC's front-line workers. However, we are dismayed that the

definition of eligibility excludes all non-unionized management employees. This is unreasonable and will certainly create a sense of division between groups of employees who are doing essentially the same work – side by side on the front lines, serving a vulnerable population, in a time of immense instability and uncertainty.

The core definition of eligibility appears to be:

- The employee is providing services deemed to be essential: for example, in an office or service point which has remained open to the public and where staff do not have the option to work from home.
- There is increased risk to the employee from contact with the general public, even where protective measures such as Plexiglas shields and limited access have been put in place, or PPE made available to staff.
- Increased stress and demands on staff due to adjustments required by COVID-19.

Some excluded management employees are working in service areas and in positions where they

¹ BC Gov News. (2020, May 19). *Pandemic pay supports front-line health, social service workers*. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020FIN0031-000907>.



meet all of these conditions. BCEEA interviews with members revealed that:

- Service BC offices around the province have remained open and in many cases are now the only accessible “government” access point for citizens. As such, they are receiving additional walk-in traffic from people looking for assistance from all Ministries and all levels of government. Service BC’s role is to provide access and front office service for a range of provincial government programs. Managers are excluded employees, but most have regularly scheduled and, as needed, front counter time, which has increased since the start of the pandemic – partly due to increased demand from the public and vacancies among the bargaining unit staff.
- While the majority of staff working in youth custody facilities are eligible for pandemic pay, excluded staff members are not. They perform many of the same functions as bargaining unit staff including intakes and contact with the public, service providers and other officials.
- Court services is another area where the rationale for pandemic eligibility would apply equally to some excluded staff as to others who are eligible. Court offices were in theory closed, but staff were directed to remain accessible to members of the public for receipt of documents and payments. Excluded managers have taken responsibility to be in the office to answer phones, receive documents and carry out work that can’t be completed remotely.
- The BC Coroners Service is responsible for investigating all unnatural, sudden and unexpected, unexplained or unattended deaths in British Columbia. Coroners come into contact with the deceased, their family members and other front-line responders frequently - any of whom could have a link to COVID. It is not possible for community coroners to practice social distancing or always immediately know the cause of death. If paramedics are eligible for temporary pandemic pay, why not community coroners?

The BCEEA believes that the temporary pandemic pay program should recognize the value and risk of work carried out by all BC government employees. It should be a benefit to everyone providing front-line government services. The BCEEA wants government to re-examine its initial rationale for providing this program to include excluded management employees. The principles of fairness and transparency will go a long way towards providing the recognition and appreciation that all staff deserve in these challenging times.

As always, the BCEEA stands ready to assist in developing such a response

How the BCEEA Can Help

Encountering workplace challenges is a common experience. BCEEA members can talk through concerns with one of our Advisors. Our experienced and management savvy Advisors fully understand your circumstances and have the expertise and insight to help you find the solutions you need. They will help you understand exactly what’s going on and will provide up-to-date information and advice. Contact us today if you have any questions.

