

Community Social Services questionnaire CUPE BC

*Completed by NDP leadership candidates Adrian Dix, Mike Farnworth, John Horgan
and Nicholas Simons*

1. Community social services workers provide a wide variety of services in our communities. Which of these services are you aware of?

Dix: Home care and support, group homes, community outreach services, victim services, counselling, employment training, rehabilitation, advocacy, transition houses.

Farnworth: Community Social Service workers form the foundation and fabric of daily life throughout almost all aspects of our communities, and are relied upon in one way or in many, by almost all of us and our families and neighbours. These services include daycare, seniors' care, multidimensional healthcare services (community nursing for infant care and vaccinations, social workers to assist with providing home care for elders and persons with disabilities, addictions services, etc.), advocacy, seniors centres or "adult daycare", women's shelters and support services, neighbourhood houses that provide services to families and have programs for youth, families and seniors. Neighbourhood houses also provide ESL services, computer-use and training services, settlement services, as well as recreation programs, and programs that assist in the integration of people with developmental delays into mainstream society. Neighbourhood houses and other community social services also provide for the support and enhancement of the lives of clients through advocacy and education, education and employment options for people with developmental delays and disabilities, and counselling services for families youth seniors and persons with disabilities.

Horgan: I am keenly aware of the many services that social service workers provide. For example, they provide everything from sexual abuse counselling to special needs support, seniors support services, family counselling, youth justice support, resource and referral services, addictions counselling, supports for foster and adoptive parents, a coalition of neighborhood houses that offer a variety of essential service to communities, boys & girls clubs. They are a cornerstone of every community in British Columbia.

Simons: I'm aware of the broad range of services provided by CSS workers. Services that help new immigrants, struggling families, people with developmental disabilities, people involved in the criminal justice system, those with mental health and addictions problems, family violence programs and many more.

2. Many of these services have suffered due to funding cuts in recent years, and as a result community needs are not being met. Which community needs do you feel are not being addressed? What will you commit to do to address these needs?

Dix: We have seen a general decline in many of the community-level, non-institutional services including home care, supports like group homes and other services. I have made the ideas of equality and social justice central to my campaign. That means improving services for people, including those I reference in this document. That is why I have said we have to roll back recent tax cuts for banks and large corporations and change the budget priorities for the provincial government.

Farnworth: Virtually every aspect of our community services have suffered directly and immensely due to funding cuts, even though these programs are needed in our communities to assist, sustain and build vibrant, safe communities. I believe that all of the programs that community social services provide are necessary for the equality and health of all of people of British Columbia, our families, and our communities. When governments cut these programs, they are not only sending a message to families and communities that their government simply does not care, they also send a message to the workers who provide these necessary services that they do not matter. We need good jobs in our communities and we need the people who do these jobs to be well paid, properly resourced, and we need them to know that their governments and their communities value the services that they provide. I strongly believe that the workers in the Community Social Service need a clear commitment from their government that the services they provide are valuable. I commit to working with communities, the workers who provide these services, and their unions, to ensure that we are moving this sector in the right direction and we are providing appropriate funding. Furthermore, I also believe that we need to support the frontline workers through respect, providing workplaces that are safe and properly resourced, and provide employment security.

Horgan: So many services have been cut that every community in B.C. has suffered. First, resources must be restored to at least 2009 levels. Second, funding

policies must be fair and secure, allowing organizations to plan for the future, insure employee retention and offer stability to clients and communities. Agencies and service providers must not be forced to compete with one another for vital funds nor should the funding criteria shift every year so that agencies are constantly having to realign their services in order to qualify for funding.

Simons: The list is too long. On a daily basis my constituency offices hear of community needs not being met; whether it is those of vulnerable seniors, youth-at-risk, or people with developmental disabilities. In addition, fair bargaining is essential to ensure that community social service workers are recruited and retained to provide essential services to clients and their families. I will commit to respectful dialogue, and measures to address the inequities in the system that have led to low wages and working conditions that do not meet the needs of employees or their clients.

3. What areas of your party's policy on community social services do you think need to be improved? Would you be willing to push for those changes before the next provincial election?

Dix: I believe that the NDP, both the party and the caucus, has worked hard to preserve and improve community social services. One great challenge is getting the right balance between services delivered at the community or neighbourhood level and those delivered through larger institutions. Over the course of time, I think we can see that the latter has tended to generally get more attention and I believe we have to make more effort to strengthen some of the community-level services that have been shown to be cost- and outcome-effective, but are still struggling for stable funding and roles.

Farnworth: My campaign is about reaching out to communities to listen to their ideas and work with them to successfully resolve problems and create opportunities. After ten years of arrogant, top-down BC Liberal governance, where everything is imposed by the Premier's Office, British Columbians are looking for an innovative and collaborative style of political leadership. The community social services sector is composed of some of our most dedicated, caring and outstanding employees in public service and they deserve a government that is open and treats them with respect. There are a number of compelling reasons why the province needs to take care to respect the collective bargaining process in the community social service sector. Those who provide care to our province's elderly, disabled and vulnerable citizens – in home care, residential care and community living – have historically

been our lowest paid civil servants. The BC Liberals have treated workers in this sector terribly – tearing up contracts and cutting pay, and undervaluing the importance of their work caring for our families and loved ones. Most of the community social service sector is designated as an essential service. That is an additional reason why bargaining between management and labour must be done in an open, free and fair manner. The recent cuts to CLBC which have been passed on to community living agencies are unacceptable. If elected leader, I will continue to advocate for the clients, staff and families who are taking on greater responsibilities with fewer resources over the BC Liberal decade in power. As Leader of the BC NDP, I will work to ensure our policies in government continue to reflect our values as a party.

Horgan: New Democrats have always had a core value and commitment to strong social services. We believe in strengthening those services so that families, seniors, and the most vulnerable can once again have confidence that the government of the province will put their needs first. I will push for a strengthening of policies to insure that happens.

Simons: The needs are significant—the Party’s policy needs to address long-term sustainability of community social services. Short-term funding cannot provide the stability in program planning or program delivery. A new approach is necessary to ensure that the services offered are meeting the needs of people receiving services, their families and communities.

- 4. Last spring, the provincial government cut \$22 million from Community Living BC (CLBC)’s meager budget. As a result, community social service agencies have had their funding reduced and many vulnerable adults with developmental disabilities have been forcibly moved out of their long-standing homes and into private home care. Do you support an end to cost-driven group home closures?**

Dix: Yes.

Farnworth: Yes.

Horgan: Yes.

Simons: Yes.

5. If you do not support an end to cost-driven group home closures, how do you propose to address the critical wait list problem?

Dix: Again, the government's budget directions have to be shifted, based on what I believe are very different priorities. This means reversing some very bad decisions on corporate tax cuts. It means carefully evaluating programs and expenditures with a different set of values than the Liberals possess. I want equality and social justice to be top-level criteria for budget choices.

Farnworth: I absolutely support an end to cost-driven group home closures.

Simons: Stop closing group homes. Stop reducing community program options. Support the expansion of services that can keep families healthy.

6. Contracting out and privatization in the community social services sector has led to problems such as cuts to services upon which fragile individuals depend. It has also led to recruitment and retention issues in the entire sector, and massive layoffs of highly dedicated, skilled and professional staff. What will you do to address contracting out/privatization in this sector?

Dix: I have fought hard in a lot of privatization situations, such as Bill 29 – the largest layoff of women in Canadian history. In most cases there is only one real rationale for contracting out and privatization: cut labour costs to boost private profits. This means reducing people's standard of living and often forcing them to work at two jobs as part of that. I am committed to stopping this wholesale attack on working people within the public sector. Public sector workers deserve respect and a fair deal, not attacks and retribution.

Farnworth: If elected, I commit to a comprehensive review of the current contracted-out services with a view to bringing as many as we can back into the public sector. I commit that we will not contract out or privatize any services that are currently public, and to an immediate moratorium on all P3s. I also believe that, when we form government, we need to address the issue of successorship rights and ensure that we protect workers' rights in all circumstances.

Horgan: After 10 years of BC Liberal policies that have promoted privatization and the steady erosion of services, it is time for a change. All current private contracts must be re-evaluated to determine if they are providing the fullest range of services, meet the needs of communities and protect the most vulnerable. A return to full

oversight and accountability must be built into all private contracts. Government must work in partnership with providers to ensure they have a professional, well paid and competent public sector workforce that provides the best services to communities.

Simons: End the race to the bottom. Focus on individual needs, not arbitrary scores based on ill-devised formulas. Respect, defend, and compensate community social service workers. I understand the importance of the community social service sector, having relied upon many services as the director of Health and Social Services for a semi-urban First Nation, and previously as a child protection social worker. Knowing the vital—but often low-profile—role they play in making our communities healthy is my motivation to work in a respectful and cooperative way.

- 7. This sector is legislatively mandated to bargain at a provincial table. This current legislation prevents unions from bargaining language to prevent privatization. Will you commit to repealing Section 6 (b) of the Community Services Labour Relations Act (2003), which states:**

A collective agreement must not contain any provision that directly or indirectly limits the government or an agency from entering into a contract with a family home provider.

Dix: Yes.

Farnworth: Yes.

Horgan: Yes.

Simons: Yes.

- 8. For public sector workers, the collective bargaining process has historically been our only method to improve working conditions and seek improvements to the services these workers provide. For example, improvements to language in our contracts can affect the ability to provide fair work practices and safe and healthy work places. Will you support community social services workers' ability to bargain a fair agreement that includes real employment security?**

Dix: Yes.

Farnworth: Yes.

Horgan: Yes.

Simons: Yes.

9. If you answered yes to #8, how would you make it happen and would you make this an election campaign priority?

Dix: I am committed to fair and free collective bargaining for public and private sector workers. That means getting rid of a number of bad laws passed by Christy Clark, Gordon Campbell and the Liberals. At this point, I cannot say what will be the campaign priorities as we don't know the timing or circumstances of the next election. In this leadership campaign, I have been very clear in making my commitment to free collective bargaining, strong employment standards, fair labour laws, and a full role for trade unions in our society and our economy.

Farnworth: Working with our partners in community social services, including unions, we may wish to review how these contracts are negotiated, and determine whether or not a province-wide table is the answer. This needs to include a broad and frank discussion with the respective unions in order to determine our priorities. If we, working together, determine that this is the right direction, then the government will need to address this issue in the Labour Relations Code. An example of issues that need to be addressed is essential service legislation, what it really means, and what the parameters and limitations to this should be. I commit that, as a government, we will ensure that we include stakeholders in these discussions, and work with labour to determine workable solutions. I will also commit to launching a comprehensive review of the Labour Relations Code.

Horgan: I believe in a partnership with social service agencies that provides adequate funding, fair and safe work practices and open and fair collective bargaining. I believe the election campaign will be about the terrible legacy of 10 years of BC Liberal government and the loss in our communities of social services and the hardship that has placed on families, seniors and the most vulnerable.

Simons: We see an assault on bargaining rights in many jurisdictions. To protect workers and their clients, it is essential that their voice be heard at the bargaining table on issues directly related to their wages and working conditions. It would be one of my priorities – although the public may not be adequately aware of the services provided, government is. As leader of the NDP, I will encourage Party membership to support policies that respect fair collective bargaining. I am also developing a policy that would require businesses and organizations that provide service under contract with the government to pay a living wage. Furthermore, I would encourage other levels of government to adopt a living wage policy similar to the living wage by-law in New Westminster.

10. Will you commit to increasing provincial government funding to the social services sector so that the services needs of the community are met and the needs of the workers providing those services are also met?

Dix: Yes.

Farnworth: Yes.

Horgan: Yes.

Simons: Yes.