



May 13, 2019

Hon. John Horgan
Premier of British Columbia
PO BOX 9041 STN PROV GOVT
Victoria, BC V8W 9E1

By email

Dear Premier Horgan,

Established in 1977, the BC Care Providers Association (BCCPA) is the leading voice for B.C.'s continuing care sector. Our growing membership base includes over 340 long-term care, assisted living, home care, home support, and commercial members from across British Columbia.

I am writing to you on behalf of long-term care providers operating in the Interior Health region who face an unprecedented emergency this summer with regards to staff shortages. Your stated goal is to build a better province for all British Columbians, and for our seniors in particular. Unless we can address the seniors care staffing crisis with the same urgency as we would tackle a wildfire or a flood, in my view that goal cannot be achieved.

As you are aware, our association has been actively encouraging your government for nearly two years to collaborate with us as well as other key stakeholders to create and implement a comprehensive health human resources (HHR) strategy. For reasons unclear to many in our sector, little if any progress has occurred in making that HHR strategy a reality.

We alerted the previous government of the looming crisis, and repeated that message as you formed government. Now we have a full-blown emergency facing care providers — felt most acutely in the B.C. Interior, but in several other corners of the province including on Vancouver Island.

Despite a commitment by the Minister of Health that a plan would be unveiled last fall, the care sector is still waiting.

After surveying long-term care providers in the Interior—who are preparing their staffing plans for this summer—we have calculated that approximately 243 full-time equivalent positions are currently unfilled. In many cases, providers will struggle to meet their contractual obligations to the health authority for funded care. Several of our members tell us they are unable to open new beds due to one reason only: a lack of human resources.

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We know of providers that have even had to fly workers into the region to ensure adequate staff are on-hand around the clock. As you can imagine, this practice is not sustainable.

It is for this reason we are asking you to consider our proposal for a short-term solution to address this emergency.

We would like to allow care providers to hire fully qualified and trained care aides from our neighbouring provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan. Prior to being hired, these care aides would have to prove they have academic credentials from a recognized training college, as well as successfully completing a criminal record check either in B.C., or their home province.

If a fully-trained care aide from Alberta or Saskatchewan wants to work in B.C., the government has put up several barriers that deter workers from accepting a job in our province. This includes requiring anyone seeking employment and wanting to work for a publicly-funded care home to cover their travel to Vancouver as well as accommodations, and pay an \$800 fee to take a test, before being accepted for the Care Aide Registry.

In some cases, these costs can go as high as \$4,500 if additional courses and training are required.

Rather than doing everything it can to recognize the bona-fide credentials of Alberta or Saskatchewan trained care aides, the Care Aide Registry has become a significant barrier for people who want to work in our province. For reasons not clear to us, the Registry fails an 99 per cent of applicants from these jurisdictions.

Many of these job candidates include licensed practical nurses with work experience in their home jurisdiction.

As you know, the Province of British Columbia was instrumental in establishing the New West Partnership Trade Agreement (NWPLA) to improve labour mobility between B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. It is our view that the deterrents care aides face gaining work in B.C. run against the spirit if not the terms of this accord.

In response to this HHR crisis, we propose a temporary measure to allow licensed care providers based in the Interior Health region to hire fully qualified and trained care aides who live within the jurisdiction covered under NWPLA.

For it to have any chance of addressing the urgent demand seniors care providers are facing, this policy be put in place by no later than July 1st. Employers must have adequate time to recruit for the summer holiday season when high numbers of staff will take vacations. This will also help to facilitate the opening of new beds in the region which your government has funded through the Interior Health Authority.

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I should point out that at a job fair held in Calgary on May 1st, approximately 500 candidates queued up looking for employment opportunities as care aides—double the number organizers expected. The higher unemployment rate in these neighbouring provinces presents an opportunity for B.C. to attract hundreds of qualified workers, and meet the needs of our seniors in care.

I would like to invite you to meet a delegation from the BC Care Providers Association as soon as possible to discuss this critical situation, and hope that your government will welcome practical and innovative approaches to ensure seniors get the care they need, when they need it.

Sincere regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daniel Fontaine".

Daniel Fontaine
CEO, BC Care Providers Association