
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
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April 16, 2019

Ministry of Labour

Eliminating barriers for emergency dispatchers, nurses, care aides

VANCOUVER – Emergency dispatchers, nurses and publicly funded health-care assistants will have easier access to workers’ compensation for mental-health disorders that come from work-related trauma.

Regulatory changes that take effect on Tuesday, April 16, 2019, make this possible.

“These changes to the Mental Disorder Presumption Regulation are about fairness and support for workers who experience higher-than-average mental harm due to the jobs they do on behalf of British Columbians,” said Harry Bains, Minister of Labour.

Last spring, government amended the Workers Compensation Act to add post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental-health disorders to the list of illnesses that are recognized as being associated with certain professions – specifically police, firefighters, paramedics, sheriffs and correctional officers. This recognition fast-tracks the claims process to access supports and compensation for those illnesses once a formal diagnosis has been made.

“I also acknowledged the need to look at other sectors for these presumptions, because certain professions are more likely to experience trauma on the job that can lead to mental illness,” Bains said. “Since last spring, we have been working with those sectors, and I am very pleased to expand the mental-health presumption to nurses, emergency dispatchers and publicly-funded health-care assistants.”

Several factors were considered for each occupation, such as the nature of the work, potential for exposure to traumatic events, rates of workers’ compensation claims for mental illness in each type of job and financial impacts of extending the presumption to the occupation.

“This is good news for B.C.’s emergency call-takers and dispatchers,” said Oliver Grüter-Andrew, CEO of E-Comm, the largest 911 call centre in B.C. “There is no doubt that, day in and day out, our people can experience high levels of emotional stress, as they work to save lives and support police and firefighters. They are the first contact for people experiencing trauma and that is often traumatic for them, as well.”

“I am very pleased to hear that the government is recognizing the mental-health needs of nurses,” said Christine Sorensen, president of the BC Nurses’ Union. “The BCNU has spent over two years highlighting how prevalent violence and PTSD are within the nursing profession. Nurses are often exposed to workplace trauma, and we are hopeful this announcement will provide both resources and support for all nurses who are suffering.”

“Health-care assistants provide frontline care in long-term care homes, hospitals, home care and other settings,” said Jennifer Whiteside, secretary-business manager of the Hospital

Employees' Union. "Care aides frequently experience violence in the workplace; witness and respond to violence, suicides and unexpected deaths; and often face threats and intimidation. Today's announcement acknowledges their valuable contributions to care, and especially of the toll that trauma experienced on-the-job can have on them."

Delivering improved protections and supports for workers are shared priorities between government and the BC Green Party caucus, and are part of the Confidence and Supply Agreement.

A backgrounder follows.

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BACKGROUND

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Amendments to Mental Disorder Presumption Regulation

B.C.'s workers' compensation system provides any worker with compensation and supports for illnesses, injuries or mental health disorders caused by their work. Funding for compensation comes from insurance premiums paid by employers.

For a claim to be accepted, medical, scientific or other evidence must be provided to establish that the condition arose from their employment, in addition to a diagnosis by a medical professional.

A "presumption" under the Workers Compensation Act provides that if a worker has been employed in specific occupations and develops a disease or disorder that is recognized as being associated with that occupation, then the condition is presumed to have been due to the nature of their work, unless the contrary is proved. With a presumptive condition, there is no longer a need to prove that a claimant's disease or disorder is work-related once a formal diagnosis has been made.

The act and regulations outline specific cancers and heart injury and diseases that impact firefighter groups, in respect to presumptions. Amendments to the act in May 2018 added mental-health disorders to the list of presumptions for federal and municipal firefighters, as well as police, paramedics, sheriffs and correctional officers.

Further amendments introduced on April 11, 2019, will extend the cancer, heart disease and mental-health disorder presumptions to wildfire fighters, fire investigators and firefighters working for First Nations and Indigenous organizations.

The announcement involves an amendment to the Mental Disorder Presumption Regulation to extend the mental health disorder presumption to the following occupations:

- Emergency dispatchers whose duties include the dispatch of firefighters, police officers and ambulance services, as well as those who receive emergency (911) calls from the public. Most dispatchers are employed by either the BC Emergency Health Services or Emergency Communications for British Columbia Incorporated.
- All nurses regulated by the B.C. College of Nursing Professionals, including licensed practical nurses, nurse practitioners, registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses.
- Health-care assistants (care aides) registered with the BC Care Aide & Community Health Worker Registry and employed in a publicly funded organization or setting.

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