



All health professionals need presumptive mental health coverage

Front line health care work is often challenging and traumatic. That's why in 2019 the BC government made it easier for nurses, emergency dispatchers, and care aids to access workers' compensation for psychological injuries and work-related trauma.

It's called presumptive coverage, and while it also protects firefighters and police officers almost 20,000 specialized health professionals on the front lines in BC are not protected by it.

With health care professional shortages at an all-time high, it's time to change that. We must extend presumptive mental health coverage to all health care and community social service professionals.

Extending presumptive coverage is urgently needed to deal with shortages in health care

- The province is currently facing a severe shortage of health care and community social service professionals. We need to ensure that workers filling these critical roles are protected and supported, and that includes reducing the barriers to accessing assistance upon receiving a mental health disorder diagnosis stemming from a workplace traumatic event.
- We know that the faster someone receives support, the faster their recovery. It also means they can return to work faster. COVID-19 makes the urgency of presumptive coverage for the whole health care and social services team even more urgent.

Presumptive coverage is already working for other front-line occupations

- In 2018, following the lead of many other provinces including Alberta, Ontario, New Brunswick, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, the BC government amended *The Workers Compensation Act* to add a mental health disorder presumption for correctional officers, emergency medical assistants, firefighters, police officers and sheriffs.
- In 2019, presumptive coverage was extended to emergency dispatchers, nurses, and care aides to ensure they have easier access to workers' compensation for psychological injuries and work-related trauma. This was a very positive step by the BC government; but it did not extend coverage to the whole team of health care and social service professionals – many of whom work shoulder to shoulder with workers who are covered – and who face psychological injuries and trauma.

Recommendation

The shortage of specialized health and community social service professionals, now at an all-time high even as we face an ongoing pandemic, now threaten systemic collapse.

These front line professionals are placed in very challenging situations. On any day, they may face a traumatic event on the job that can result in a mental health injury. However, they face barriers to quickly accessing the support they need to recover.

We need to do everything possible to recruit new professionals, hold on to the ones we have, and help those in need recover quickly and get back to work serving British Columbians.

- We urge government to expand presumptive coverage to include all health care and community social service professionals under the Workers Compensation Act Mental Disorder Presumption Regulation.