



**Submission to the Select Standing Committee
On Finance and Government Services
Budget 2021 Consultations**

Submission By:
The Canadian Union of Public Employees
British Columbia Division

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Introduction

The Canadian Union of Public Employees British Columbia (CUPE BC) appreciates the opportunity to submit its views on priorities for the 2021 budget to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services.

CUPE BC represents more than 100,000 workers in British Columbia who deliver public services across a wide range of sectors including education, child care, community social services, community health, municipalities and local government, transit, and libraries. Our members' ability to deliver quality public services and goods is greatly determined by BC's provincial budget; in turn, our members are an integral part of how this province translates a provincial budget into the goods and services that are foundational to strong and healthy communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made 2020 a very difficult year for people across BC. We know that the 2021 budget must be focused on a way forward, re-envisioning how we deliver public services in a way that not only helps our communities survive, but also helps them thrive. Through these unprecedented times, our members continue to be on the ground, providing vital services that keep British Columbians safe and healthy. More than ever, the working conditions in the public sector are foundational to the health and prosperity of our communities and are directly impacted by budget prioritization.

The proposals in this document contain high level budget policy recommendations and specific pressing needs identified by our members in each sector. This document was written to prioritize and highlight recommendations in libraries, education and child care. However, it should be noted that in general, investments in the public sector are going to be one of the most effective strategies for economic recovery¹; the unemployment and underemployment that have arisen due during the pandemic deters private investment. The government can help fill this gap by directly investing in public services to boost employment and aid economic recovery. Moreover, investments in the public sector have "multiplier" effects on the private sector as jobs will be created in the industries that supply the necessary materials and services for the initial investment.²

We urge the government to take an intersectional lens to the differential impacts of the pandemic, recognizing that gender minorities, racialized people, people with disabilities and people belonging to the LGBTQ2+ community have disproportionately seen losses to jobs, income and general wellbeing. For example, while much of the economic stimulus spending tends to favour male-dominated fields like construction, increased spending in female-dominated sectors, like libraries, child care, and education is vitally important to our economic recovery and an important step toward a more equitable society.³ We are optimistic that this coming budget will likewise take a progressive approach to recovery plans, looking for ways for British Columbia to move forward together in uncertain times.

¹ Marcos, Sofia Vilela São. *The impact of public investment on private investment in 21 OECD countries over the period 2000-2017*. Diss. 2019.

² ADB, Abdul Abiad, Davide Furceri, and Petia Topalova IMF. "The macroeconomic effects of public investment: Evidence from advanced economies." *Journal of Macroeconomics* 50 (2016): 224-240.

³ De Henau, Jerome, et al. "Investing in the Care Economy. A gender analysis of employment stimulus in seven OECD countries." (2016).

Recommendation 1: Analyze the current taxation structure for the Province through a progressive lens and enact taxation changes that will focus on fairness.

British Columbia has been hit hard by a crisis of unaffordability, which has been both highlighted and exacerbated by the pandemic. Progressive taxation has historically been one of the great forces for stability during times of crisis.⁴ A better system of progressive taxation can help provide the resources necessary to enact the types of social spending that are essential to the economic and social recovery of our communities and ensure fair contributions from those benefiting most from a rebounding economy.

Recommendation 2: Increase the tax rate on incomes over \$220,000 to at least 22 per cent.

Studies show that progressive taxation can have positive effects on the unemployment rate.⁵ With unemployment rates across the province soaring during these unprecedented times, BC needs to leverage a diversity of fiscal tools. Not only will progressive taxation help the province collect the funds required to create jobs to enable people to return to the workforce, but progressive taxation can also indirectly improve aggregate employment.⁶

Recommendation 3: Review the structure of tax exemptions and credits to ensure that it meets current progressive tax policy outcomes.

In 2018, British Columbia's Auditor General recommended more transparency on tax expenditure reporting, which totals approximately \$7 billion per year. Government should analyze the current structure of tax deductions to ensure that the system works to meet policy objectives and has remained relevant to the needs of British Columbia residents over the past two decades. There is significant opportunity to fight poverty, make life more affordable for middle income earners, and better support equity-seeking groups during BC's recovery phases. British Columbia can meet progressive taxation goals through a redistribution of tax credits.

Recommendation 4: Restructure Partnerships BC to provide assistance and expertise to develop public infrastructure that is publicly financed, maintained and operated.

All of us benefit when investments are made in public infrastructure; however, not all infrastructure funding models are created equal. The secrecy and lack of transparency around so-called "public private partnerships" is very troubling.

The BC government should be harnessing its own borrowing power to build public infrastructure and then operating that infrastructure instead of regressive models under which user fees and hefty payments from government line the pockets of corporate shareholders. Further, governments should not be allocating public funds to support private corporations in their bid to privatize the vital infrastructure and services that British Columbians rely upon every day.

⁴ Philippova, N. V., et al. "Social equity: A route to progressive taxation of individuals." (2018).

⁵ Lucifora, Claudio, and Simone Moriconi. "Progressive Taxation and Unemployment: Evidence from OECD countries 3." *Italian Fiscal Policy Review*. 2015 1 (2017): 51.

⁶ Lucifora, Claudio, and Simone Moriconi. "Progressive Taxation and Unemployment: Evidence from OECD countries 3." *Italian Fiscal Policy Review*. 2015 1 (2017): 58.

Taxpayers are going to pay for these projects one way or another, and it is more advantageous to build, maintain and operate our facilities publicly. It's cheaper and provides more accountability. Let's own and control them ourselves, for the public interest and not for private profits.

Recommendation 5: Provide permanent funding for the BC Centre for Women in Trades.

Women represent an average of just four per cent of the skilled trades workforce in BC and that number has barely moved in decades. Isolation, discrimination and poor workplace cultures have long been barriers for women entering and staying in the trades. Significantly increasing the number of women and other underrepresented groups in trades careers is crucial to bridging the gap, particularly given the current skilled trades labour shortage.

Economic recovery plans tend to favour male-dominated sectors. While CUPE BC is advocating for major investments in the care economy which tends to be more female dominated, it is important that we also make room for women and gender minorities in male-dominated sectors. Permanent funding for the BC Centre for Women in Trades will help ensure that investments in work in the trades are more equitable.

Recommendation 6: Invest in infrastructure to create reliable cell phone services in all parts of BC

With the need for physical distancing to handle pandemics, lack of cell phone signal access in rural parts of BC is only widening the gap between our rural and urban communities. Cellular phones have become an integral and essential part of our working and social lives in the “new normal”, and our access to communication technology should reflect that.

Recommendation 7: Increase and ensure adequate funding for the Labour Relations Board.

The Labour Relations Board's funding was significantly reduced from \$7,728,000 in 2004 to \$4,175,000 in 2017, a 46 per cent reduction without factoring inflation.⁷ This led to a dramatic reduction in staffing levels. Moreover, the lack of funding has led to a lack of investment in vital tools and resources for the Board; for example, the Board's computer system still uses an antiquated DOS interface that means that they cannot accurately track cases, or identify trends the way an administrative tribunal ought to be able to do.

The Board plays a vital role in ensuring labour relations in British Columbia is fair and balanced and protects the rights of workers to organize. The chronic underfunding that has resulted in understaffing and a lack of resources is impeding the Board's ability to meet its obligations under the Labour Relations Code. For the Board to give full effect to Code protections and rights, there needs to be a significant and sustained increase in funding to ensure its adjudicative role functions effectively and efficiently.

⁷ <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/332/2018/10/Labour-Relations-Code-Review-Panel-Report.pdf>

Sector-Specific Recommendations

EDUCATION

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of accessible education in BC, whether that is in-person or online. Public education is not only important for the growth and development of our children, but it also enables many parents to participate in the labour market as their kids are cared for during the school day. While the pandemic has disproportionately disadvantaged equity-seeking groups, accessible public education is a way forward for providing opportunities to future generations that will help balance the scales, whether this is at the level of early childhood education, kindergarten to grade 12, or post-secondary education.

K-12 Education

Education Assistants (EAs) have been essential to providing instructional support, working with children with diverse and complex needs. EAs have always been essential to improving the educational experience for all children.⁸ With more online learning, multi-modal learning, and other adaptations to our education system, instructional support is more important than ever;⁹ we know that with limited in-person time, the emotional connections between teachers and students that are essential to student learning are difficult to make and maintain online.¹⁰ By providing support in and outside of class time with teachers, EAs can help students continue to make these essential emotional connections to their education system to improve their learning outcomes.

EAs are a key resource for ensuring that every student has a chance at quality education during these difficult times. While we don't know what the future of education will look like in the middle and long term, it is clear that all learning spaces, both physical and virtual, need more Education Assistant support.

Recommendation 8: Fund more training spaces and bursaries for Education Assistants to ensure BC has enough trained staff for student support and success through the coming semesters.

The pandemic and our move to online and multi-modal learning has exposed gaps in our education system, and more EAs are needed to address this shortage.

In new phases of reopening physical education spaces, EAs will be essential to maintaining the health and advancing the success of our children. Whether it is by modelling and helping with frequent handwashing for our children, encouraging safer play, or helping maintain appropriate physical distancing between students throughout the school day, EAs are going to be essential to implementing the recommendations that will keep our children and families safer and healthier, while ensuring continued educational

⁸ Chopra, Ritu V., and Michael F. Giangreco. "Effective Use of Teacher Assistants in Inclusive Classrooms." *The SAGE Handbook of Inclusion and Diversity in Education* (2019): 193.

⁹ Li, Chi-Sing, and Beverly Irby. "An overview of online education: Attractiveness, benefits, challenges, concerns and recommendations." *College Student Journal* 42.2 (2008).

¹⁰ Li, Yinghui, et al. "Research on Multi-modal Affective Assistant Model in Online Synchronous Teaching." *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Computer Science and Application Engineering*. 2018.

success.

CUPE BC continues to have serious concerns about staffing levels and working conditions for EAs. Insufficient hours remain one of the most prominent concerns our leaders hear from our Education Assistants. Shifts that generally range from 4 to 6 hours per day means that large numbers of EAs are not earning living wages, and either struggle to make ends meet, or are forced to stitch full-time hours together by working multiple jobs.

Recommendation 9: Fund early childhood education training for Education Assistants so they are better able to provide high quality before and after school learning and care.

Many school districts face significant difficulties filling already existing EA positions. Support staff continue to report that insufficient hours of employment, which create personal hardship for our members, has been the major contributor to the recruitment and retention problems that many districts place. Improvements in hours and wages would go a long way for achieving recruitment and retention to meet the demands in the K-12 system.

Part of the solution to the recruitment and retention problem for EAs may lie in the expansion of public child care in school spaces. Access to child care so parents can return to work has become more important than ever during BC's phases of reopening, especially for ensuring that women have equal opportunity to return to work. With early childhood education training, our EAs could be providing before and after school care services in-house using the "seamless day" model in which children get to start and end their day in the same education facility with familiar staff. This well-regarded and high quality child care model would provide EAs the full-time hours needed for sustainable fair wage employment, and thusly help with ongoing recruitment and retention challenges. This solution would also provide much needed child care spaces and relieve pressure on parents, both of which contribute to our economic recovery in a way that is sensitive to issues of gender equity.

Recommendation 10: Ensure that sufficient funding be allocated to the K-12 budget to provide for full-time hours for custodial staff and to immediately restore adequate staffing levels going forward.

Over the last two decades, CUPE custodial workers across the province have raised concerns over the limited dayshifts and daytime hours, which is threatening their ability to perform the work that they know is vital to maintaining a safe and healthy learning environment for students.

The increase we saw to daytime hours this past year has been hugely beneficial to our custodial workers' ability to perform their jobs well and safely; however, it will not be enough going forward with the demands for cleaning of high-touch areas in school during the pandemic. Understaffing and overwork in this area is a health and safety issue for all staff and students, especially now that sanitization is more important than ever for continuing to flatten the curve.

Recommendation 11: Create province-wide guidelines for school practices that districts may adapt to their individual needs so that new practices are not decided entirely on a

district-by-district basis.

As schools reopened under the Provincial Health Officer's guidelines, school districts responded in different ways. Our workers are concerned about the amount of autonomy that school districts were afforded when it came to decisions about occupational health and safety as well as the safety of children. While districts' need for some autonomy to adapt recommendations to their individual needs and available resources is reasonable, standardization of guidance could help keep our workers, and hence our families, healthier and safer. Further, standardization across districts would help greatly with communication to parents and workers about what is expected in work and learning spaces across the province, whereas lack of standardization creates uncertainty, instability and conflicting understanding as workers and parents compare and contrast standards between adjacent districts.

Recommendation 12: *Bring food programs that have been contracted out to private and non-profit companies back in-house to ensure better regulation, oversight and accountability for the health and safety of our children and families.*

Over the last few decades, the province has downloaded school breakfast and lunch programs onto non-profit societies or contracted them to private companies. With the necessity of increased standards for health and safety when it comes to food handling, these services should be provided in-house by trained support staff. This will allow for better accountability as well as reliability of this service.

Recommendation 13: *Increase funding for the hiring of adequate IT staff to support teachers as well as students and parents who are working with online-learning and multi-modal learning platforms.*

As remote and online education systems are expanded, more Information Technology (IT) supports for student learning are needed. Parents often find themselves troubleshooting technology problems at home when trying to ensure their children can get an education even while physically distancing. While we do not know what the future of education will be post-pandemic, it is clear that multi-modal learning is here to stay. With technology becoming more integral to jobs, this increase in digital education delivery will positively contribute to educational outcomes but require increased integration of technology in and outside of classrooms for education. The system, as it exists today, does not have the adequate resources to facilitate this technological evolution, and an increase in IT support staff is needed.

Recommendation 14: *Provide funding to restore positions for public health nurses in schools.*

Over the last two decades, nursing and health services have been cut from schools and many students only see healthcare professionals for in-school vaccines. With the new standards for providing first aid and other non-emergency medical care during the pandemic, having a trained and dedicated healthcare professional for children in every school is essential. Not only would they be helpful in assessing the health of children presenting symptoms of COVID-19, but they would also be helpful for addressing general, everyday health concerns in a way that keeps our children, our teachers, and our support

staff safe. The return of this essential service seems even more timely given the staggering number of British Columbians that lack access to a family doctor or primary care provider.¹¹

Recommendation 15: Eliminate public funding to elite private schools.

This course of action would likely require a progressive reduction, but should be undertaken with the aim of redirecting public funds to the public system. CUPE BC believes that a strong public education system is the best way to ensure that education is inclusive, equitable, and accessible. Public education is the backbone of a democratic society.

Early Childhood Education and Child Care

Public child care for parents who are essential workers allowed healthcare and first-responder systems to operating during the pandemic. As the province transitions to a new phase of pandemic management, access to child care for all families is vital to getting people back to work and enabling other parts of the economy to reopen. Without accessible, affordable, quality child care in place, parents called back to work will not be able to return – regardless of the decisions made by our government about reopening the economy. Such a situation would have far-reaching economic and social implications for the province and its recovery efforts. Conversely, investments in public child care bring with them the creation of stable, good paying jobs in the child care sector that can themselves aid in our economic recovery.

Recommendation 16: Continue, enhance and make permanent existing emergency child care in schools.

When BC schools cancelled in-class learning, and child care centres were forced to operate at a reduced capacity, the impact of child care shortages were clearly visible. Only days into BC's pandemic response, child care was deemed an essential service required to maintain our necessary systems and to support the economy. The challenge of quickly creating high quality, safe and affordable child care was met through direct delivery by school districts using existing CUPE members. When called upon, BC's public education system was able to quickly adapt and offer this vital service because the organization of before and after school care in BC's public schools is completely congruent with the existing spaces, staffing and administrative structures of the K-12 system.

Recommendation 17: Invest in infrastructure (physical spaces, retrofits, etc.) that enable expansion of child care services in public schools and the future delivery of zero to five-year-old child care options.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Starting Strong V Report (OECD, 2017) confirms that the transition from early childhood education to public school is a big step for children. Further investments in high quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and smooth transitions between the various stages of early education are key for children's long-term learning and development. For most children in

¹¹ <https://thetyee.ca/News/2020/03/20/Many-In-BC-Dont-Have-Family-Doctors/>

BC, school-based kindergarten is currently the only place where ECEC and education overlap.¹²

As the “new normal” becomes a reality, it will be important to ensure that child care services have proper accountability measures to keep workers and children safe, and that parents have confidence in those measures. Public child care delivered by school districts has such measures built in as part of an existing robust public system with accountability and oversight infrastructure. The reality of public child care in school districts means that parents have access to accountability through those at their child’s school, through the district and the local school board, and through the BC government. Further, the BC government and the Provincial Health Officer have multiple tools of accountability to ensure that child care is adhering to provincial health orders, meeting the needs of communities across the province, and is not being delivered in a manner that risks further outbreaks of COVID-19.

Recommendation 18: Invest in a “seamless day” model of before- and after-school child care to improve access to affordable, high quality child care, and to improve children’s learning outcomes throughout their school years.

Expansion of early learning into public school systems is often suggested as ensuring all five-year-olds have access to full-day kindergarten and then expanding public school to include younger children. However, this still does not solve the problem of before- and after-school care since the school day is typically 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., and this is not what a typical workday looks like for parents. A seamless day model of before- and after-school care provided in schools would mean that children would get to begin and end their day at school.

The seamless day model looks to both deliver high quality ECEC while also solving a practical problem for parents and helping to alleviate the stress of finding quality before- and after-school care. Public delivery by school boards ensures high quality programs, better wages and working conditions for ECEs, and provides for oversight with an existing governance structure.

The benefits of the seamless day are many: from increased learning, to better quality care, to savings from shared facilities and administrative structures, to better use of highly trained staff. Importantly, the seamless day is a means for BC to take a giant leap forward in early learning and ensure our youngest learners are receiving the social, educational, and behavioural support needed to ensure their success in future education and beyond.

ECE positions in the seamless day model would offer full-time job opportunities to EAs who desire this employment with options to work as ECEs on a full-time basis, or just in the before and after school portions of the day as needed. Though simply having staff working as ECEs before and after school, and as EAs during the school day does not constitute the seamless day model, this form of integrated day would offer many benefits as an intermediary step as the ECE labour force adjusts to meet demands. With minimal additional investment, EAs lacking an ECE designation could qualify as ECE assistants and begin working likely within a six-month timeframe. This is an excellent means to

¹² https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/starting-strong-v_9789264276253-en#page15

bridge the labour force gap and aid in recruitment and retention. Skilled staff are essential in delivering quality early childhood education programs and while the continued use of the ECE designation as a minimum standard is not a long-term solution, it does provide an increased level of training to the “Responsible Adult” designation outlined in the current regulations.

Recommendation 19: Move the responsibility for child care from the Ministry of Children and Family Development to the Ministry of Education.

CUPE BC holds the position that child care should be viewed through the lens of “early learning,” and as such, should be the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, along with a mandate to create child care spaces in schools. This would better enable the Ministry of Education to play a key and necessary role in the creation of universal child care in our province.

A major barrier to building an integrated ECEC system in BC is the current division between education and child care. As described in *Integrating Child Care and Early Education: A Central Theme in Early Care and Learning*, implementing an integrated approach to child care and education eliminates the ‘split system’ approach where child care is viewed as a social service and early education services as education.

Currently, responsibility for BC’s early childhood education and care is split between three Ministries:

- Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD): Child care policy and funding programs, including child care subsidies; operating funding; major and minor capital funding; the ECE Registry; and Indigenous child and family supports.
- Ministry of Health (HLTH): Child care licensing, with monitoring carried out through local health authorities.
- Ministry of Education (EDUC): Kindergarten, StrongStart BC Early Learning Programs and the Ready, Set Learn initiative.

Research shows that countries with successful early care and learning systems house responsibility for both child care and education under one government branch.¹³ The research on this topic overwhelmingly supports this conclusion. The BC government should follow the recommendation of the Coalition of Child Care Advocates and the Early Childhood Educators of BC as outlined in the *\$10 a Day Plan* to move the Child Care Branch and Minister of State for Child Care to the Ministry of Education. Over time other child care functions such as licensing, which are currently housed in other ministries, should also be moved to the Ministry of Education.

Post-secondary Education

CUPE BC represents more than 15,000 post-secondary education workers at BC’s colleges and universities. From providing direct instruction and participating in research to maintenance, ancillary and student services, academic support, recreation, events, libraries, and clerical roles, CUPE BC members work in every facet of our post-secondary

¹³ Friendly, et all (2018).

institutions. CUPE members, along with faculty and students, are a key part of the campus community and recognized as partners in academic governance through education councils, senates, college boards and university boards of governors.

Recommendation 20: Review the post-secondary funding model with the goal of increasing per-student funding, reducing reliance on international education and other profit-generating activities, and restoring majority public funding.

As institutions struggled to balance budgets in recent years, they cut services while adding students and increasing tuition fees. Institutions also increasingly turned to international students as a source of funding. With the ability to charge international students two or three times the fees charged to domestic students, institutions soon turned their focus towards this enterprise and quite literally began selling education at a profit to subsidize the BC government's funding cuts. With higher fees and fewer services, and with international education as the system's priority, domestic enrolment began to decline. Between 2013 and 2017 (and as the number of BC youth aged 18 to 24 increased,) ¹⁴ Ministry-funded enrolments declined by 5 per cent, representing a loss of more than 8,500 students ¹⁵ (based on headcount, the system actually experienced a more than 10 per cent decline in domestic enrolment between 2009 and 2017 ¹⁶). Despite this trend, overall enrolments continued to climb due to a 156 per cent increase in international students. ¹⁷

As a result of the trend outlined above, the stability of the system has become more precarious as public institutions have grown over-dependent on international student revenue. International students' tuition fees represent nearly 50 per cent of all tuition fee revenue in BC, while international students themselves still represent less than 20 per cent of the student body ¹⁸. The risks of this precarity are sadly illustrated in the current financial challenges faced by colleges and universities across the province who are facing large financial shortfalls due to moderate or even small changes in international enrolment due to the coronavirus.

Recommendation 21: Restore post-secondary funding to 2001-2002 levels (in current dollars) and eliminate the present shortfall.

The previous government's approach to post-secondary education has had a devastating effect on the system's ability to perform its key objectives, adapt to change, and overcome adversity. Perhaps the greatest undermining of the system came in the form of funding cuts, with the proportion of provincial funding decreasing by 24 per cent between 2000 and 2016. ¹⁹ During the 1980s, more than 80 per cent of BC college and university budgets came from public funding; that proportion is now at just 43 per cent. ²⁰ By 2017, more than

¹⁴ BC Stats. (2017) "British Columbia Population Projections: 2017 to 2041." Government of British Columbia, 2017. <http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/StatisticsBySubject/Demography/PopulationProjections.aspx>

¹⁵ BC Stats. (2019) "Student Full-time Equivalent Enrolments and BC Public Post-secondary Institutions" <https://catalogue.data.gov.bc.ca/dataset/full-time-equivalent-enrolments-at-b-c-public-post-secondary-institutions>

¹⁶ BC Stats. (2019) "Domestic and International Student Head Count by Economic development Region and Institution" <https://catalogue.data.gov.bc.ca/dataset/domestic-and-international-student-headcount-by-economic-development-region-and-institution/resource/d090dded-e0ef-438c-8bca-e6da321973b0>

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ BC Federation of Students (2019) "International Students in British Columbia" <https://www.wearebcstudents.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Rsch-International-Students-2019-web.pdf>

¹⁹ Statistics Canada (2019). Table 477-0058 - Financial information of universities and degree-granting colleges, revenues by type of funds, annual (dollars), (accessed: June 20, 2019)

²⁰ Statistics Canada (2019). Table 37-10-0026-01: Revenues of universities and degree-granting colleges

\$400 million had been cut from BC's post-secondary system when accounting for inflation and it is worth emphasizing this point: *"public" universities in BC are now less than 50 percent publicly funded.*

As a result of underfunding, our post-secondary institutions are being forced to pursue private sources of funding. They are becoming more like "education businesses" rather than public institutions serving the public good through educating our society. After 16 years under the BC Liberals, the college boards and university boards of governors dominated by partisan appointments who pushed forward a neoliberal agenda aimed at making our post-secondary institutions more financially independent from government, with little regard for the transformative impact the pursuit of private revenue has on the goals and aims of the institutions or the education provided.

When the focus is on selling degrees, the quality of the education and the support services provided can be justifiably compromised in order to save costs. Evidence of this includes cuts to student support services such as counselling, increased class sizes, and the increasing role of contract teaching staff rather than permanent faculty. It is imperative to prevent institutions from prioritizing profit over their purpose as public institution - to provide our communities with educated workers, and innovative research aimed at the betterment of society.

Recommendation 22: *Immediately freeze and progressively reduce tuition fees, replacing lost user fee revenue with the restoration of per-student public funding.*

The current BC government has made enormous advancements in post-secondary education affordability, providing new means for those from low- and middle-income families to get the education they need to build a better life. The introduction of the BC Access Grant Program has added to such past changes as the elimination of interest on student loans and the removal of tuition fees for students in adult basic education and for former youth in care. These are extremely important steps in making post-secondary education more affordable and reducing barriers for those who already face the greatest obstacles.

Recommendation 23: *Make investments in student financial assistance to create a program of student loan forgiveness for low- and middle-income families, and increase levels of levels of grant funding, through both the BC Access Grant Program and through targeted grants to align with labour market needs (both by program and by region).*

Despite progressive reforms, affordability challenges remain. Tuition and other compulsory fees have doubled since the BC Liberals came into power in 2001. In 2001-2002 the average undergraduate tuition was \$2,527; in 2015-2016 it was \$5,964. Tuition fees continue to increase each year while funding has declined. Not only does this pattern make education less affordable every single year, over time it shifts the responsibility for education costs onto families. With very real possibility of a multi-year recession and resulting unemployment, fewer families will have the means to pay for the education needed to retrain, and re-enter the workforce. Accordingly, further investments are needed to reduce barriers to those seeking education and training, and to reduce the proportion of education costs downloaded onto families.

Recommendation 24: Provide targeted increases in funding to colleges and universities to restore lost domestic enrolment through increased capacity in key areas for economic recovery, development and innovation, such as red seal certified trades, health and other professional programs, and graduate education and research.²¹

The effects on COVID-19 on international education were immediate and significant. Ongoing limits to international travel and changes to learning models have, and will continue to, stress international student enrolments causing substantial shortfalls in expected for-profit tuition fee revenue. This, coupled with increased domestic demand due to a deep and potentially multi-year recession, will cause immense financial strain on the post-secondary system, which is already suffering significant financial stress as outlined above.

Universities and colleges are vital engines of economic recovery. They provide necessary retraining to unemployed and underemployed workers, which is of particular benefit to those whose skills and qualifications are misaligned with the current labour force demands. Additionally, post-secondary education provides an important mechanism to reduce unemployment as those entering the education system are temporarily removed from the labour market surplus. Taken together, these two roles mean that our colleges and universities are positioned to take surplus labour for which there is no work, and provide the skills and training necessary to reintegrate workers into the labour market in areas where demand outstrips supply. A further benefit is that while in study, unemployed workers have access to a range of programs and services that provide socio-economic supports and thereby relieve pressure from other government programs already stressed with record-high unemployment.

Recommendation 25: Increase investment in education, training, innovation and research aimed at addressing BC's greatest challenges, specifically:

- *Providing assistance to health authorities in treating and resolving the opioid overdose crisis;*
- *Developing options to address housing affordability and homelessness;*
- *Helping to effectively implement the UNDRIP and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Action in all parts of the province, and*
- *Creating innovative ideas to address the climate crisis and reduce reliance on fossil fuels.*

Colleges and university are not simply providers of education, they play an important role in civil society by generating and enhancing knowledge, contributing to economic and societal advancement, and defending freedoms and democracy. Accordingly, our post-secondary education system could play a much larger role in addressing our provinces greatest challenges if so empowered and if the resources were made available.

Recommendation 26: Ensure that colleges and universities are themselves operating in a manner that supports employment and builds a better BC for their workers, students and the community by requiring institutions to:

- *Become fair wage employers, and ensure this policy is applied to any contracts the*

²¹ Professional programs is used here to represent the range of university and college programs that prepare students for a career in which mastery is required to enter, and this generally corresponds to those professions overseen by a professional organization or college of practice. Examples include common programs like nursing, teaching/early childhood education, engineering, and social work, but also include more specialized post-graduate programs like urban planning, occupational therapy (and other related rehabilitation sciences), medicine, psychology, and radiation sciences.

- institution is engaged in;*
- *Reduce precarious work (converting and combining auxiliary/casual and seasonal employment into regular, full-time, year-round jobs);*
 - *Contract-in services previously outsourced, in particular those provided by non-fair wage employers;*
 - *Ensure that movement of courses and programs online is a temporary measure and does not become a permanent tool of institutions seeking to save money by cutting face-to-face delivery.*
 - *Improve implementation of the Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy Act, in particular updates requiring all BC post-secondary institutions to have a sexual violence and misconduct policy; considering the disproportionate effects of sexual violence on women of marginalized backgrounds and identities, and how each institution can better support those who experience domestic violence.*

Chronic underfunding has put immense pressure on all parts of our post-secondary system, but the cuts have disproportionately been applied to campus services and facilities. As a result, staff workloads increased while pay did not keep up with inflation, and work became more precarious. For non-academic workers, as full-time regular staff retire, institutions are not hiring replacement full-time regular staff. Instead, post-secondary institutions are increasingly relying on part-time and casual staff that often have limited access to benefits. In some areas, institutions are simply contracting work out to low-wage, for-profit companies whose return on investment is enhanced by shorting our campus communities of the services they rely on.

Precarious work and the negative effects of contracting out in the post-secondary sector is most strongly felt by those who work in food, custodial, and facilities services as work is outsourced to such large corporations as Compass, Sodexo, Chartwells, Best Cleaners, and a whole host of firms providing trades and maintenance services.²² These corporations pay low wages and use pending contract bids as an excuse not to improve poor working conditions.²³ This has ramifications for the state of maintenance and upkeep on BC's post-secondary campuses and for the overall quality of employment provided by BC's tax dollars. Post-secondary funding should include directed funding to be utilized for maintenance specifically. Safe and clean infrastructure is best and safest for all workers and students on our post-secondary campuses, and those working to provide these services on campuses deserve fair working conditions.

Our academic workers also face precarity as budget shortfalls have meant that institutions are hesitant to hire tenured faculty and permanent teaching staff. Class sizes are growing, and teaching assistants, employed on temporary contracts, are being asked to play an increasingly significant role in core teaching functions and are consistently pressured to take on extremely high workloads. Post-secondary institutions have also become over-reliant on under-paid contract sessional instructors, with limited or no job security, to expand the course offerings instead of using permanent teaching staff.

²² CUPE 2017 - Quality Jobs, Quality Education, Better Futures: REPORT What We Heard About Precarious Work In the Post-Secondary Sector https://cupe.ca/sites/cupe/files/report_townhalls_2017_05_18.pdf

²³ <http://bcemploymentstandardscoalition.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/BCESC-Workers-Stories-of-Exploitation-and-Abuse-July-2017.pdf>

In response to the spread of COVID-19, BC's colleges and universities moved swiftly to convert face-to-face learning into online delivery in March 2020 so the final month of the Winter 2020 semester could be completed. Soon thereafter, institutions began considering a more permanent move to online and distance delivery as part of a "hybrid" model for fall 2020 and beyond, seemingly with plans to continue such a model until a viable vaccine or treatment for COVID-19 is available. As institutions plan for increased online programming, further growth in the use of teaching assistants and contract faculty should not be considered as a viable alternative. Temporary moves to online learning should remain temporary and not be made permanent except in cases where there is a bona fide improvement to pedagogy or where the delivery model resolves issues of accessibility and accommodation.

Recommendation 27: *Increase funding to address deferred maintenance issues and to support renovation projects using in-house staff.*

LIBRARIES

Libraries play a critical role in our society by providing free access to knowledge, information and related services to everyone. Today, they are one of the only public institutions that are truly equitable in providing services for all community members enabling them to participate in, and benefit from, the social and economic development of their communities.

CUPE members across the province work every day to provide these vital services to their communities. When the pandemic hit, in-person programs were temporarily moved online, take-out book services were created and implemented, and plans were put in place so patrons and staff could safely return to branches and resume adapted in-person services. As the economy "re-opens," libraries are not being prioritized, leaving thousands of British Columbians without access to the important services they provide.

Libraries are a key service needed during BC's recovery. With record unemployment rates, British Columbians must be able to continue to access free internet and technology services so they can apply for government services and programs, and conduct job searches so they can re-enter the labour market. Libraries provide the main access point to internet and technology for many who cannot afford high-speed internet or a computer at home, and they offer a reliable internet connection to those who may live remotely. Libraries must continue to bridge the digital divide throughout our recovery phase in communities large and small across the province.

Libraries also provide a range of vital services to families.²⁴ At a time when parents and guardians have become primarily responsible for their children's education, access to the resources libraries offer is paramount. This is especially true for newcomers and vulnerable populations, who also rely heavily on libraries to assist them with a wide variety of specialty services, including information about targeted supports and program referrals.

For families, vulnerable populations, those with special and unique needs, those seeking

²⁴ <http://www.policynote.ca/public-libraries-are-becoming-the-new-social-safety-net/>

employment, those without home amenities, and everyone else in our communities, libraries provide a safe, welcoming space at no cost. When libraries are not open, underfunded, or otherwise under resourced, our other social services feel the effects. In fact, social service and community agencies rely on libraries and their services to support communities, and without robust library services in place, these agencies would become overburdened, and in some cases completely overwhelmed.

Recommendation 28: Increase funding for public libraries in BC to \$20 million per year, and ensure immediate adequate funding to sustain full operations throughout the pandemic, and support libraries with direct one-time emergency pandemic funding to help cover the gap in operating expenses.

In our submission to this Committee in 2019, we urged the government to increase funding to \$20 million per year. While some improvements resulted in Budget 2020, we repeat the recommendation this year. As libraries struggle with the outcomes of COVID-19 and their need to adapt operations, they are also confronted by the fiscal challenges of municipalities. Limited municipal resources, and an inability of libraries to raise funds themselves, puts the vital services of libraries at risk at a time when they are needed most. This funding would act as a temporary top up recognizing the financial challenges municipalities currently face, and would go directly to library systems who would determine how to best use the funding to serve the unique needs of their community.

Recommendation 29: Ensure any future funding to libraries includes support not only for programs and/or services but also includes direct support for the staff providing the services.

Library services require dedicated informed staff able to meet the needs of patrons and adapt to the evolving role of libraries as community service hubs. While libraries have maintained minimal services through remote operation and online platforms, this represents only a fraction of the services patrons rely on.²⁵ With commercial entities in retail, hospitality and other sectors building back robust in-person service offerings, public services must also find sustainable ways to fulfill the fullness of their mandate to serve the public. For libraries this means restoring fully staffed library services and programs and physically reopening libraries.

Recommendation 30: Specifically increase funding for Indigenous communities to access library services and free internet.

Many rural and indigenous communities in BC have little or no access to library services. In particular, without specific agreements in place, residents of Indigenous reserve communities may not have access to nearby municipal library services. The BC government should invest the staffing, training, and infrastructure necessary to ensure that Indigenous communities on reserve have access to borrowing print materials, internet, and other digital and technological resources provided by libraries.

Recommendation 31: Create a program directing provincial funding to support small,

²⁵<https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/242/2018/04/Canadian-Union-of-Public-Employees-British-Columbia-Library-Workers.pdf>

rural and remote libraries and library systems beginning with an initial annual investment of \$5 million with funds dedicated to service and program enhancements.

All rural libraries across BC are important hubs for community service and internet access, and this dependency is even greater as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The remoteness of many BC communities is exacerbated by an economic downturn that limits the financial ability of citizens to travel to major centres to access services and resources. Small rural libraries, funded by local municipalities themselves hurt by an economic slowdown in such sectors as tourism and natural resources, have fewer resources to fund needed library services. Direct provincial funding is needed to support all libraries, but in particular those in BC's small and remote communities.

MUNICIPAL WORKERS

More than ever, municipal workers have been on the ground, making sure that British Columbians still have waste collection, water processing, bylaw officers, park attendants and more, while the rest of us do our best to physically distance ourselves. Over the last two decades, senior levels of government have downloaded more responsibilities to local governments, but without the necessary funds to pay for them. This was made even more apparent by the pandemic response. Municipalities in BC still depend primarily on property taxes and user fees to pay their bills, and as user fees entirely dropped off during the early phases of the pandemic, municipalities struggled to provide essential services. These revenues weren't designed to support the types of services municipalities need to provide especially during crises.

Municipal workers are essential to the pandemic response. Moving into BC's phases of reopening and recovery, more recreation and cultural activities are needed for people's mental health and wellbeing. The best way to ensure that those recreation and cultural activities are following proper precautions is to have those services provided by municipal workers who have professional training and experience, and are already part of the municipal system with an appropriate accountability system. As more data is released about mental health and wellbeing during pandemic times, it is clear that local governments must reopen, re-invigorate, and even expand parks, recreation and cultural services moving forward.

The ability for BC's local governments to run a deficit to ensure they can provide vital services for our communities has made a huge difference for looking forward for getting through the pandemic in the short-term. However, our municipalities are facing unprecedented pressures as the pandemic is exposing new gaps in the foundation of our communities. Our municipalities need better revenue sources if we want them to continue to feed our recovery and future growth.

Recommendation 32: Investigate progressive models for fair taxation and make new progressive models of revenue generation available to municipalities.

Recommendation 33: Provide needs-based funding for municipal programs including recreation and cultural programs and facilities to support the health and wellbeing of our community.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Our social services workers are essential to the care of people with developmental disabilities, they support families and youth in need, they provide quality child care, they assist people with substance abuse issues, and they support victims of violence. They are necessary to the care of our vulnerable populations. Through the pandemic, they were essential services offering critical assistance and support for the health and well-being of thousands of British Columbians.

The low-wage redress and the elimination of contract flipping have been a huge step forward in closing the wage gap that has persisted between these workers and others doing similar work but who work directly in the healthcare sector. The province's efforts have helped in protecting those jobs and wages, thereby increasing worker retention, worker safety, and quality of care.

Recommendation 34: *Continue with its effort to address low wages for those doing care work and its effort to pursue wage parity amongst those doing this work across sectors.*

The gap between social services workers and other workers doing similar work in the healthcare sector can also be seen by the fact that social service workers often receive fewer and lesser job protections. One of these instances is that social service workers have their pay reduced by 20 per cent on sick days. This and other such provisions constitute an unfair and unequitable system in which the same work is devalued based on the venue in which that work is conducted. This unfairness should be corrected.

Recommendation 35: *Provide adequate funding for sick days paid at 100 per cent of regular wages.*

With the rate of pay offered for sick days for our social services sector, it's possible that members have to choose between losing 20 per cent of their paycheque and going to work sick. Recognizing that social services are essential support to our most vulnerable populations in BC, it is time we make sick leave an option rather than a punishment. This kind of measure will ensure a healthy and safe workplace, which means healthy and safe families in BC. Further, in light of the heightened requirement to ensure that workers are not going to work sick during the coronavirus pandemic, measures such as this which serve as a disincentive to stay home while sick, are especially unhelpful and even dangerous. The BC government must be a leader in providing fair sick pay in order to better encourage those in the private sector to do the same.

COMMUNITY HEALTH

CUPE BC represents more than 1,400 workers in community health across multiple health authorities – Fraser Health, Vancouver Coastal Health, and Island Health. About 800 of our members work under the Health Sciences Professionals Bargaining Association (HSPBA) collective agreement, and about 500 are employed under the Community Bargaining Association (CBA) contract. We represent a large variety of professions including clerical support clerks, environmental health officers, mental health workers, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, social workers, and many more.

CUPE's health science professionals are an integral part of the health care team that will deliver the surgeries and procedures outlined in BC's Surgical Renewal Plan. A key component of our recovery plan in BC is increasing surgical capacity, and the entire health care team is needed to effectively execute this plan.

As outlined in the Surgical Renewal Plan²⁶, everyone must be "all-in to move forward." This must include increasing essential personnel and "health authorities need reassurance that they have a sustainable level of staffing to phase in new capacity strategies."

The Surgical Renewal Plan also outlines the need to have targeted and proactive recruitment efforts in place to "ensure we have the right number of health-care professionals to deliver and sustain renewal in the months and years to come." CUPE BC is pleased that other staff supporting surgery have also been identified as necessary in ensuring the ability to increase surgical capacity and we stress the importance of specific funding being allocated to the entire health care team supporting surgeries to best serve British Columbians moving forward.

Recommendation 36: *Provide specific funding to support the recruitment and retention of health science professionals, including administrative staff, to ensure B.C's Surgical Renewal Plan can be delivered in full.*

Recruitment and retention funding would be directed to all, and not only those who directly work providing surgical care. Those workers who support the surgical team such as administrative staff, pharmacists, speech pathologists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists also require support with recruitment and retention for the Surgical Renewal Plan to be delivered as envisioned.

Recommendation 37: *Increase funding for staffing in community health with a focus on practitioners in home health units and hard to fill vacancies.*

The community health sector is in urgent need of more funding for staffing, especially in-home health where workload is currently at crisis levels. Working short, increasing caseloads and case complexity and unpaid overtime are systemic throughout the community health sector. Increased funding will ensure program delivery is fully supported to provide the quality of care British Columbians require, while also reducing workloads to a reasonable level and providing relief to the workers who provide these critical programs.

A workload survey conducted in the fall of 2017 demonstrated that this sector is dependent on staff working short and 73 percent of CBA survey respondents regularly work unpaid time during their breaks, and before and after work. In general, workers reported that managers are not willing or able to provide overtime when needed. As frontline workers in health, CUPE members understand the importance of their work and find it challenging to leave work unfinished. Without adequate staffing or the availability of overtime, workers feel pressured to sacrifice their own breaks, sometimes at the cost of their own health and well-being. Furthermore, the quality of public services is suffering as a result of workload. Less than half of HSPBA members are satisfied with the level of

²⁶ <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/conducting-health-research/surgical-renewal-plan.pdf>

service they can provide, and nearly 80 per cent said that workload impacts quality of service.

Our Environmental Health and Licensing Officers for day care and adult care facilities reported only being able to respond to immediate demands and not having time to complete the routine checks required to ensure compliance with provincial regulations for health and safety.

The most significant burnout and workload stress is among our home health practitioners. Patients are being discharged from hospital and referred to home health without adequate consideration of staff available to provide care. This puts vulnerable patients at risk and causes moral distress for our members, who feel that this very serious issue is being overlooked. There are currently no case load limits and, as a result, practitioner caseloads are extremely unreasonable. For example, many of our Social Worker Case Managers, Occupational Therapists, and Physiotherapists have caseloads of more than 130 patients. More than 50 percent of our survey respondents in home health said they are not able to see patients within the prescribed timeframe. Furthermore, practitioners reported the frustration of only being able to respond to the immediate needs of and risks facing patients, even though they could support them in activities that would help them reach a full recovery if they had more time.

In addition to the unreasonable size of caseloads, patients are becoming more complex. More acute patients are being discharged from hospital sooner, and there has also been an increase in patients who are facing poverty, mental health, addiction and other vulnerabilities that make the provision of care more complex. In order for community health care and home care to be successful, to address significant recruitment and retention issues, and to ensure quality of care, adequate staffing needs to be provided.

Recommendation 38: *Create more stand-alone addiction treatment facilities for self-identified women and non-binary persons.*

With BC's ongoing opioid crisis, we need more solutions that are dedicated to addressing addiction as a mental health issue which means ensuring that there are facilities accessible to everyone regardless of their gender identity.

Trans people fear enacted stigma in the forms of social rejection and violence.²⁷ Health and service providers sometimes fail to defend and support trans people against social rejection and violence. Even worse, these institutions sometimes perpetuate stigma, rejection and violence toward trans people, through policies, programs and attitudes.

With gender-based anti-stigma policies and programs, stand-alone facilities that are dedicated to self-identified women and non-binary persons can increase the chances of successful addiction treatment by ensuring the safety of their clients.

TRANSPORTATION

²⁷ Lyons, Tara, et al. "A qualitative study of transgender individuals' experiences in residential addiction treatment settings: stigma and inclusivity." *Substance abuse treatment, prevention, and policy* 10.1 (2015): 17.

Recommendation 39: Make the Northern BC bus system permanent and more robust.

Rural access to essential services has always been an issue, one which has only been highlighted by the pandemic when the Northern BC transportation system was reduced. Many people in rural communities rely on bus services to access health services, employment, education, and even visit family.

BC Bus North is already providing this intercity service between Prince Rupert, Prince George, Dawson Creek, Fort St. John, Fort Nelson, Valemount and many communities in between. However, there are many communities still lacking this service, and the infrequent bus schedules need to be multiplied.

We know that profit-driven private companies are simply not willing to provide the bus services that our rural communities need. The provision of this service by provincial government is about making sure that people across British Columbia have safe and reliable access to services. This is an opportunity for BC to step up and close the gap between our rural and urban communities in BC

Conclusion

British Columbia's 2021 budget needs to be pragmatic as the province and its' citizens look toward recovery during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. CUPE BC's recommendations are all based on the fact that maintaining—and increasing—investment in public services is a much more effective tool to spurring economic recovery²⁸ than so-called “austerity budgets” as some right-wing, neoliberal politicians espouse.

A truly successful and forward-thinking approach will use a strategy that is mindful of the differential intersectional impacts of the pandemic. Gender minorities, racialized people, Indigenous people, people with disabilities and people belonging to the LGBTQ2+ community and young people have disproportionately seen losses to jobs, income and general wellbeing. Now that the gaps in the foundation have been exposed, the 2021 BC budget can aim to lift up those belonging to equity-seeking groups to build a stronger BC for everyone. CUPE BC is recommending increased spending in public sectors and programs as part of a strategy for economic recovery that will move us toward a more equitable society.



²⁸ Marcos, Sofia Vilela São. *The impact of public investment on private investment in 21 OECD countries over the period 2000-2017*. Diss. 2019.