

MEMORANDUM

Date: March 16, 2023

Cliff: 1064357

To: all BCEHS staff

File: 195-20

Re: Update on BCEHS Culture

In the fall of 2021 and winter of 2022 — through station tours and meetings with you — I heard experiences and concerns you had about BCEHS workplaces. The staff survey last year reinforced what I heard in meeting with many of you and highlighted that there was work to do.

Since then, we've taken a number of actions to ensure our BCEHS workplaces are safe, that they are respectful, that they are inclusive, and that they promote and foster the mental health and well-being of all employees.

We looked into our organization and beyond to see BCEHS from an employee's perspective and see the factors that impact employee experience. This meant reviewing organizational statistics, policies, and training materials while also seeking feedback on best practices to support making our workplaces safe, respectful, and inclusive.

Experiences shared by our co-workers revealed examples of workplace bullying, sexual harassment, and racist attitudes and conduct. For people like us — devoted to caring for others when they are at their most vulnerable — these behaviours have been difficult to experience, to see, and to hear about from colleagues and friends.

Every one of us knows these behaviours have no place in our BCEHS workplaces. And I am — we are — taking the action required to make change.

Here are the actions we plan to take, and the commitments I make to you:

1. **BCEHS will be a workplace that is safe, respectful, and inclusive, with clear guidance and training to prevent and address bullying, discrimination, and sexual harassment.**

This commitment will be achieved with a new BCEHS People Strategy that outlines the behaviours, culture, values, and work environment BCEHS embraces. The People Strategy is in progress and will be shared with all employees and the BCEHS Board by May 1, 2023 for review and input. Once input is received, the People Strategy will be finalized and presented to the Board for approval and implementation.

Following the adoption of the People Strategy, in addition to reviewing our pre-existing conduct policies, we will implement a standalone Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Policy, and a Gender Equity Strategy. Once approved, they will be communicated to the entire organization, training will begin, and their performance will be measured.

The Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Policy will expand upon current conduct policies, set out behaviours that constitute sexual harassment, outline steps to report and resolve it, and it will be supported with specialized training for staff in Human Resources who deal with sexual harassment complaints.

The BCEHS Gender Equity Strategy will establish and reaffirm our commitment to fairness and gender equity including salary, access to promotion, and training. It will include targets to increase the number of women and those who identify as women in leadership roles at all management levels.

In the interim, as this work is finalized and comes into effect across our BCEHS workplaces, we are providing, effective immediately, a dedicated phone line at 1-877-522-1590 for anyone experiencing or witnessing sexual harassment, bullying, or discrimination, and anyone who feels that previous action on their experience was not adequate, through which you can reach out, be protected, and listened to. You will be able to receive access to support services and have action taken.

The People Strategy, the Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Policy, and the Gender Equity Strategy will be comprehensive and incorporate and launch a number of features and actions.

These include reverse mentoring and shadowing opportunities for female paramedics, ensuring interview panels are diverse to reduce bias, that recruitment panels use evidence of candidates' professional development in making their choice for internal promotion, and that diversity, equity, and inclusion are part of the incoming training for all clinical and non-clinical staff.

It also means that BCEHS management and the Board will have training on sexual harassment and receive quarterly reports that demonstrate progress on fulfilling the promise of the People Strategy in eliminating sexual harassment and gender bias.

As well, once the People and Gender Equity strategies are implemented, action to build allyship awareness will be introduced to equip staff with skills to help when witnessing behaviours injurious to colleagues and workplace safety and inclusiveness.

In addition, staff surveys will become more regular to address gender and diversity issues and identify actions required to improve them, and a number of initiatives to promote diversity, equity and inclusion will be advanced.

Training modules in respectful workplace, bullying and harassment, sexual harassment and related communication skills will be evaluated and will also be examined for their effectiveness in contributing to trainees' knowledge, skills, and performance. Managers and leaders will be trained in conflict management.

2. If challenges prevent achieving a safe, respectful, and inclusive workplace, we will quickly, thoughtfully, and effectively take action.

The development and use of data is key to all our initiatives to create safe and inclusive workplaces. This includes regularly analyzing human resource data, referrals of issues to the Emergency Medical Assistants Licensing Board, and employee exit data — to determine where our People and Gender Equity strategies and our Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Policy need to do more to create safe and inclusive workplaces.

3. We will continue to diversify the organization.

The Talent Acquisition Team is now more diverse in age, gender, and background. It engages the PHSA Indigenous Recruitment and Employee Experience Team, and the BCEHS Indigenous Team to support recruitment panels.

In September 2021, five female BCEHS paramedics formed the Women in Paramedicine Special Interest Group. The group has the BCEHS Chief Operating Officer designated as their Executive Sponsor. They are meeting regularly to discuss issues and actions required to improve the safety and inclusivity of BCEHS workplaces.

As of October 2022, all job postings have been revised to include a matrix of Indigenous Cultural Safety Competencies based on job level. As well, a question asking staff about their actions in support of diversity, equality, and inclusion is now a required part of every management interview.

Furthermore, we will continue to incorporate recommendations from the In Plain Sight Report and remain committed to eliminating Indigenous-specific racism experienced by staff and patients in health care.

4. I will report to you every other month on progress made and next steps required in achieving our commitment to safe, respectful, and inclusive workplaces.

As you may have seen around our BCEHS workplaces, some of this work has already started, and some of these changes are already being made.

Since COVID-19 restrictions on gathering in groups were lifted, the BCEHS senior leadership has significantly increased the number of in-person sessions and staff engagement visits. Over the past several months leadership have visited different parts of the province, with further tours planned for this spring and summer. We are committed to meeting with you, dedicating time for staff engagement, creating professional development plans and reviewing them regularly.

As well, Managers and Leaders are recognizing staff achievements through Long Service and Exemplary Service Awards.

I thank each of you for your commitment to making a difference — not just for you but for all of us.

Mental health and wellness are key to how we perform our duties. The actions taken by BCEHS apply to every single BCEHS workplace and to every single BCEHS employee. They will make our workplace safer, and better — helping us to retain staff, attract staff, and to reduce absenteeism.

In building our approach, none of this work is being done in isolation. As I said at the outset, we are working with the Ministry of Health and the PHSA to make these essential changes, and I appreciate their shared commitment to our action to create and maintain safe, respectful, and inclusive workplaces. To this end, other actions are also ongoing.

The BCEHS Board of Directors will establish a Special Committee to oversee the implementation of these actions and follow up with broader engagement with you as work progresses. It will contract

a Special Advisor to help determine the extent of sexual harassment, racism, and bullying occurring and provide advice to address and eliminate these behaviours. This will include ensuring that processes for dealing with complaints are easy to access and thorough in addressing unacceptable behaviour.

We will hire a Chief People, Culture and Diversity Officer, and additional senior leadership, to assist me in making these changes to create safe, respectful, and inclusive workplaces. And I, through the Special Committee of the Board of Directors, will report in six months to the Ministry of Health on progress made and next steps to be taken.

There is much work done — and to do — to ensure BCEHS workplaces are safe, respectful, and inclusive. Some of this work is underway, some of it has been completed, and some of it is only beginning.

But everyone has the responsibility to contribute to a positive work environment. Everyone has the right to work in an environment free from sexual harassment, free from discrimination, and free from bullying — a workplace where staff are accountable for their actions. We all know this.

To everyone I've met with, and heard from, and anyone who feels their BCEHS workplace is not safe, respectful, or inclusive, I want you to know that we hear you, we want to hear from you, and that we are making changes. These actions and commitments should rightly give all of us confidence to report our experience with behaviours that are contrary to a workplace that is safe, respectful, and inclusive — one that does not tolerate or excuse sexual harassment, bullying, and discrimination.

That is my further commitment to you: **You are not alone.** We will work together to have a safe, respectful, and inclusive workplace.

Sincerely,

Leanne Heppell
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I acknowledge with gratitude that I work within the unceded territory of the x^wməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tseil-Waututh), and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) Nations.