

# SOCIAL UNION FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT

## Annual Report to the Ministerial Council on Social Policy Renewal

on

### Residency-based Mobility Barriers

2002

## INTRODUCTION

First Ministers (with the exception of the Premier of Quebec) signed the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA) on February 4, 1999. This agreement defined a new partnership approach between governments in the planning and managing of Canada's social union.

Participating governments are responsible for ensuring that the commitments made in the SUFA are implemented in their jurisdictions. At the intergovernmental level, the Federal/Provincial/Territorial (F/P/T) Ministerial Council on Social Policy Renewal is leading the implementation of the SUFA. Hon. Murray Coell, Minister of Human Resources, has been British Columbia's representative on the Ministerial Council since May, 2001. From August 2001 to July 2002, Hon. Coell acted as Provincial/Territorial Co-Chair of the F/P/T Ministerial Council.

The mobility provisions of Section 2 of the SUFA are intended to ensure that all Canadians have access to essential social programs and services of reasonably comparable quality wherever they live or move in Canada.

Section 2 of the SUFA provides:

*All governments believe that the freedom of movement of Canadians to pursue opportunities anywhere in Canada is an essential element of Canadian citizenship.*

*Governments will ensure that no new barriers to mobility are created in new social policy initiatives.*

*Governments will eliminate, within three years, any residency-based policies or practices which constrain access to post-secondary education, training, health and social services and social assistance unless they can be demonstrated to be reasonable and consistent with the principles of the Social Union Framework.*

*Accordingly, sector Ministers will submit annual reports to the Ministerial Council identifying residency-based barriers to access and providing action plans to eliminate them.*

*Governments are also committed to ensure, by July 1, 2001, full compliance with the mobility provisions of the Agreement on Internal Trade by all entities subject to those provisions, including the requirements for mutual recognition of occupational qualifications and for eliminating residency requirements for access to employment opportunities.*

British Columbia herewith submits its third annual mobility report to the Ministerial Council. This report indicates the progress made to date in identifying and eliminating residency-based barriers as described in section 2 of the SUFA.

It should be noted that the provisions relating to the Agreement on Internal Trade are being implemented under the auspices of the Forum of Labour Market Ministers and are therefore not addressed in this report.

## **THE BRITISH COLUMBIA ACTION PLAN**

- Over the past three years, implementation of British Columbia's SUFA obligations has been co-ordinated by the Intergovernmental Relations Secretariat (IGRS).
- IGRS has established a Social Policy Reference Group of officials from ministries having policies and practices which may be impacted by SUFA. The following Ministries are currently actively involved in the identification and elimination of unreasonable residency-based barriers to social programs covered by Section 2 of the Social Union Framework Agreement:
  - Ministry of Finance
  - Ministry of Children and Family Development
  - Ministry of Human Resources
  - Ministry of Advanced Education
  - Ministry of Community, Aboriginal, and Women's Services (including Housing and Immigration)
  - Ministry of Health Services
  - Ministry of Attorney General
  - Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General

The above agencies were asked to review all of their policies, programs and practices to determine:

- Whether there were any residency-based policies or practices in place;
- Whether any such policies or practices had the effect of constraining access to programs as described in the SUFA (i.e. whether they constituted barriers to mobility);
- Whether such policies and practices could be demonstrated to be reasonable and consistent with the principles of the SUFA as a whole; and,
- Whether there were any plans in place to eliminate barriers which did not meet the test of reasonableness and consistency with SUFA principles.

### **PROGRESS TO DATE:**

Over the past three years, Ministries undertook to review all social programs and identify any residency-based policies and practices in British Columbia in the program areas identified in section 2 of the SUFA. Ministries also conducted a wider review of programs delivered through third-party agencies that operate under Ministry authority. Finally, Ministries reviewed those policies and practices identified to determine whether they had the effect of limiting mobility and whether they were reasonable and consistent with SUFA principles.

No barriers were identified in programs administered by the following Ministries or agencies under their authority:

- Ministry of Children and Family Development
- Ministry of Finance
- Ministry of Human Resources
- Ministry of Attorney General
- Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General

### **Barriers Eliminated**

During the review, the Ministry of Advanced Education and the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services identified and eliminated the following barriers:

- The Ministry of Advanced Education modified its policy on Student Loans to make loans available to B.C. students studying at post-secondary institutions outside of the Province. Previously, B.C. students studying out of province could not receive a loan unless the

program was unavailable in B.C., was oversubscribed, or was in the French language.

- On the recommendation of the Native Economic Development Advisory Board, the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs (now the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services) removed the residency study requirement for bursaries under the First Citizens' Fund. This policy change allowed B.C. Aboriginal students who studied at recognized post-secondary institutions outside of the province to become eligible for bursaries.
- The British Columbia Housing Management Commission, which falls under the authority of the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal, and Women's Services, removed its one-year waiting period for eligibility for social housing.

#### The Ministry of Health Services

As part of its review of programs and policies, the Ministry of Health Services has examined residency requirements for a number of home and community services. For the most part, the Ministry has concluded that these requirements are reasonable and consistent with SUFA principles and with the policies of other provinces. However, the Ministry is continuing its review of residency requirements for home support services.

While residency requirements are in place in British Columbia for insured physician and hospital services, these requirements are covered by inter-provincial reciprocal billing arrangements and therefore do not constitute barriers to mobility.

#### **CONCLUSIONS:**

British Columbia is close to completing its review of existing social programs administered by Ministries or delivered through third-party agencies that operate under Ministry authority, in the areas covered by Section 2 of the Social Union Framework Agreement. Three unreasonable residency-based barriers have been identified and removed and administrative changes have been made to increase policy flexibility.

British Columbia will continue to monitor all new or modified programs and services to ensure that no new unreasonable residency-based barriers are created.

British Columbia reiterates its concerns regarding the impact of the mobility provisions in the SUFA as they relate to Aboriginal people moving off-reserve.

Once again British Columbia calls on the federal government to address barriers to mobility for Aboriginal people by ensuring equal access to federally-funded programs for Aboriginal people both on and off reserve.