

SOCIAL UNION FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT

Annual Report to the Ministerial Council on Social Policy Renewal

on

Residency-based Mobility Barriers

2001

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, was named as the British Columbia representative on the Ministerial Council following the change of government in May, 2001. In August of 2001, Hon. Coell assumed responsibility 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 second annual mobility report to the Ministerial Council. This report indicates the progress made in identifying and eliminating residency-based barriers as described in Section 2 of the SUFA since the Province's first annual report in the Spring of 2000.

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 two 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 have been actively involved over the past year 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)
 - 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
- Whether there were any plans in place to eliminate barriers which did not meet the test of reasonableness and consistency with SUFA principles

British Columbia is committed to fulfilling its mobility commitments under the SUFA by February 2002.

PROGRESS OUTLINED IN THE 2000 REPORT:

In the first year of the Social Union Framework Agreement, 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 then 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 at that time by the Ministries of Women's Equality, Children and Families, and Finance.

During 2000, reviews were ongoing but not yet complete in the Ministry of Health and in the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security (now Human Resources) responsible at that time for housing policy.

However, the following barriers were identified and eliminated:

- 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 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 First Citizens' Fund is now administered by the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services.

PROGRESS IN YEAR TWO:

In the second year of the Social Union Framework Agreement, Ministries that had not yet completed their review of Ministry programs continued their work. In addition, all Ministries undertook to conduct a wider review of programs delivered through third-party agencies that operate under Ministry authority.

The following Ministries have completed their reviews of existing programs within their Ministries and have identified no unreasonable residency-based barriers in the areas covered by Section 2 of the SUFA:

- Ministry of Finance
- Ministry of Children and Family Development
- Ministry of Advanced Education
- Ministry of Human Resources
- Ministry of Health Services
- Ministry of Attorney General
- Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General

The Ministry of Community, Aboriginal, and Women's Services (also responsible for housing) has completed its review of current programs and has identified one unreasonable residency-based barrier which has been removed:

- The British Columbia Housing Management Commission, which falls under the authority of the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal, and Women's Services, has removed its one-year waiting period for eligibility for social housing. The only residency requirements currently in place are that all members of the household must currently reside in British Columbia. (There are other requirements relating to Canadian citizenship or immigration status).

CONCLUSIONS:

British Columbia has now completed its initial review of all existing social programs administered by Ministries in the areas covered by Section 2 of the Social Union Framework Agreement. Three unreasonable residency-based barriers have been identified and removed.

During the third year of the Agreement, British Columbia will continue its ongoing review of programs and services delivered through third-party agencies that operate under Ministry authority. In addition, the Province will continue to monitor all new or modified programs and services to ensure that no new unreasonable residency-based barriers are created.

As noted in the 2000 Mobility Report, British Columbia has given consideration to the impact of the mobility provisions in the SUFA as they relate to Aboriginal people moving off-reserve and has found that impact to be considerable. British Columbia now 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.