

January 31, 2024

The Honourable Adrian Dix  
Minister of Health  
Government of British Columbia  
PO BOX 9050 STN PROV GOVT  
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Sent via Email: [HLTH.Minister@gov.bc.ca](mailto:HLTH.Minister@gov.bc.ca)

**Subject: BCAC Follow-up on MSP Eligibility for Temporary Foreign Workers**

Dear Minister,

On behalf of British Columbia's farmers and ranchers, thank you for your ongoing efforts to ensure quality, cost-effective, and timely healthcare services for our province. I am writing on this occasion to follow-up on a matter that requires your urgent attention and which was raised by BC Agriculture Council (BCAC) in a letter addressed to you on December 12, 2023.

I am writing to ask for your support in **extending on-arrival Medical Services Plan (MSP) coverage to temporary foreign workers** (TFWs) recruited under the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) and the Agricultural Stream Program (Ag Stream).

In B.C., TFWs are only eligible for MSP coverage until they have resided in the province for at least three months but would be required to repay any benefits if they were to leave the province before six months. This leaves TFWs reliant on private health insurance, which may not be recognized by a clinic or hospital. Private insurance also presents an additional expense for the employer, who must already pay employer health tax based on wages paid to TFWs. SAWP contracts include a health insurance package negotiated between the source country and the insurance provider, according to which workers pay for the coverage through a daily fee. In some cases, TFWs requiring medical attention must rely on their farm employer to cover their treatment costs directly, pending a claim to their insurer.

Approximately 80% of these seasonal workers return to the same farm year after year. Unfortunately, they are also required to wait for MSP coverage each time they return to B.C.

Compared to other provinces, TFWs in B.C. are disadvantaged by the three-month waiting period. For example, TFWs are eligible for Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) coverage on arrival. If B.C. does not match the coverage afforded to these workers in other provinces, this could become a factor in workers increasingly seeking work opportunities in other Canadian jurisdictions. The delayed coverage in B.C. has been raised as a significant issue of concern by the governments of source countries for TFWs.

Due to the seasonal nature of agricultural work, TFWs are essential to the food security of our communities and the sustainability of farming in B.C. According to forecasting from the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC), the domestic labour force in our province will be unable to fill about 15,200 on-farm jobs by 2029. Workers participating in SAWP and Ag Stream have played, and continue to play, a vital role in addressing some of that labour

shortage. BCAC is also actively supporting the development of a National Workforce Strategic Plan for Agriculture and Food and Beverage Manufacturing, led by CAHRC, that will advance other means of addressing the labour shortage, such as skills development opportunities for domestic workers and increased automation.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of B.C. administratively waived the three-month waiting period. Permanently waiving this requirement for TFWs under SAWP and Ag Stream would address challenges facing both farm employers and TFWs and it would bring B.C. in line with other provinces. Alternatively, Section 2 of the Medical and Health Care Services Regulation could be amended to include a new clause specific to SAWP and Ag Stream workers. This could be modeled on Section 2(b.1), which extends coverage to persons "...admitted to Canada under a Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel issued by the government of Canada".

This has been an outstanding issue for many years but is of growing urgency to both farm employers and TFWs. If this issue cannot be resolved by the end of this year, it at least requires a decision from you by March 31, 2024.

BCAC is the lead industry advocate for key sector-wide priorities in the province. Our mission is to grow a strong, sustainable, and competitive agriculture sector through building industry consensus and advancing public policy. We achieve this by delivering a unified voice for the sector to government through the 28 unique commodity associations we represent. In turn, the approximately 20,000 farm families who hold membership in these associations generate 96% of provincial farm gate sales in B.C.

I would be happy to meet with you or relevant staff from your Ministry to further discuss such opportunities to improve MSP access for agricultural workers. Please do not hesitate to contact BCAC's Executive Director, Danielle Synotte, via email at [dsynotte@bcac.ca](mailto:dsynotte@bcac.ca) or via telephone at 604-854-4454 for any additional information or to coordinate such a meeting.

Thank you for your kind attention to this matter! I look forward to any opportunity to collaborate with you on the sustainability of agriculture and the well-being of British Columbians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J. Woike', with a large, stylized loop at the end.

Jennifer Woike, President  
BC Agriculture Council

CC: Hon. Pam Alexis, B.C. Minister of Agriculture and Food  
Berenice Díaz Ceballos, Consul General of Mexico in Vancouver