
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2018PREM0013-000547
March 31, 2018

Office of the Premier
Ministry of Health

Woodlands' survivors finally to receive redress from provincial government

NEW WESTMINSTER – Former residents of Woodlands who attended the school before Aug. 1, 1974, will finally receive compensation for systemic abuse suffered at the provincial institution, announced Premier John Horgan.

“For nearly 20 years, former residents of Woodlands have fought for compassion, closure and some level of justice. Today, the B.C. government is finally doing the right thing by extending compensation to individuals previously denied redress for the abuse they suffered at this provincial institution,” Premier Horgan said.

People who resided at Woodlands prior to 1974 will receive \$10,000 in an ex-gratia payment. In addition, people who resided in Woodlands after 1974 will receive up to a maximum of \$10,000. The payment will take into account settlement awards previously provided through the Woodlands class action settlement.

“This is a historic occasion that closes this dark chapter in B.C. history,” said Bill McArthur, a Woodlands survivor. “Today acknowledges and vindicates Woodlands survivors, who I hope can live the rest of their lives with a sense of self-respect and dignity.”

“I want to recognize the Woodlands survivors, many who I met on this issue more than a decade ago,” said Health Minister Adrian Dix. “They have persisted against prejudice and mistreatment from the Province for decades, even after the school shut its doors and a settlement agreement was reached with some former residents. Today’s announcement brings some small measure of justice for them, and I am very proud of the Premier and many advocates for making it happen.”

Woodlands was an institution in New Westminister open from 1878 until 1996. In 1950, it became Woodlands School, and in 1974 the name was changed again – to Woodlands. Woodlands provided care for children and adults with developmental disabilities, and some individuals with both developmental disabilities and mental illness.

In 2002, the then-provincial ombudsperson, Dulcie McCallum, determined that there had been widespread sexual, physical and psychological abuse of Woodlands’ residents. However, the provincial government at the time did not accept the findings of the ombudsperson’s report.

In August 2002, a class action was commenced by former Woodlands residents. After it was certified, the Province sought and won a ruling at the B.C. Court of Appeal to exclude former students who lived at Woodlands prior to Aug. 1, 1974. This decision was applied to the settlement agreement eventually reached in 2009, and approved in 2010, establishing a compensation claims process.

“Today is a bittersweet day. Bitter, because it has taken too many years of pushing for justice for the survivors of the Woodlands institution, and sweet because, finally, after so long, B.C.’s new provincial government has done the right thing and recognized the systemic abuse experienced by all former Woodlands residents,” said Jane Dyson, executive director, Disability Alliance BC. “Disability Alliance BC sincerely thanks Premier Horgan, his government and Minister Dix for showing the leadership and compassion Woodlands survivors have waited so long to see.”

“When I began working on this case in 2006, with the now-Minister Adrian Dix, it was clear that the road to justice would be long and difficult,” said David Klein, of Klein Lawyers, who acts for the Woodlands survivors in the class action lawsuit. “But, the morality of the survivors’ claims impelled me to persevere on their behalf. And we did encounter more than a decade of legal, political and financial challenges. We met those challenges and stand here today – a momentous day – to declare an important victory for the Woodlands survivors. We are also able to declare that our new provincial government is taking the correct and compassionate steps to remedy a dark historic wrong. This is a moral victory, not just for the Woodlands survivors, but for all British Columbians.”

A process will be developed over the coming months to confirm addresses and contact information of the former Woodlands residents. It is expected that monies will be paid out by March 31, 2019.

The payments are being made on an ex-gratia basis, without admission of liability on the part of the Province.

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