

GOVERNMENT-PROVINCIAL

NB PAY EQUITY GROUP CRIES

FOUL

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The New Brunswick Coalition for Pay Equity is crying foul over how the provincial government is doling out home support workers' pay equity adjustments.

The provincial government plans to increase home support workers' pay by \$2.15 an hour, so it reaches \$13.15 over a five-year period. The plan was devised after male- and female-dominated job salaries were compared a few years ago.

Split evenly over the five years, the increase would amount to 43 cents per year; however, the coalition recently learned that this year workers would see an increase of only 37 cents an hour, with the remaining 6 cents going to pay for home support companies' increased expenses related to pay equity. It covers things like their increased contributions to employee insurance and Canada Pension Plan.

"Home support workers should not be forced to shoulder the financial responsibilities of their employers," said Vallie Stearns, chair of the coalition. "It's absolutely unacceptable."

However, Marie-Claude Blais, minister responsible for Women's Equality, said home support workers will still get their full \$2.15 raise over five years.

"When we made the payments, as promised, it certainly became apparent that we also had to make adjustments in regard to the employers," she said in an interview yesterday. "This does not mean that we will not fulfil our commitments to the home support workers. They will be given their \$2.15 salary increase, but it will be done through the schedules that we have, which is over the five years."

Blais said while she understands the role the coalition for pay equity plays, the workers were never promised evenly split 43-cent raises per year.

"I don't think that anyone was expecting \$1 or 50 cents or 40 cents," she said. "We had to come to an agreement, and the agreement was not just the number, it was also the 'how,' and the pay equity bureau has worked with the employer and the employee, and this is the solution that was found."

Blais said the government cares about the well-being of the support workers, but "at the same time, we are conscious that it is a partnership (with employers) and we all have to work together."

Meanwhile, the New Brunswick Home Support Association has weighed in, clarifying that they didn't lower the employees' pay instalments.

Brenda Dykeman, president of the association, said government is deciding what size each yearly instalment will be. While the first was 37 cents, the next "could be 25, it could be 60 - we don't know."

Dykeman said home support agencies have had the difficult task of determining how many hours employees have worked in the past year and a half to determine how much back pay is owed to them. The pay equity increases were supposed to begin in April 2012, but government didn't start issuing instalments until June of this year.

The association and coalition both feel that workers should be receiving their entire pay increase now rather than spread over five years.

"It certainly would be marvellous if we could, as a government, say, 'The inequity is such-and-such dollars an hour, here is the full payment,?'" Blais said. "But we live in a world right now where it is very difficult. The economy is difficult, it is difficult for employers and employees. We are a government that has supported pay equity. It continues to be a priority. We are working now with the implementation and we are moving forward with our pay equity payments."

Stearns said there have been many problems with the pay equity scheme thus far. She said by being doled out over five years, workers will continue to suffer due to low wages. Also, she said by the time workers get their full increase, they'll be making wages they should have in 2010.

"They have not gotten true pay equity," she said.

She said the government's methodology for determining how much home support workers should be paid is flawed. Stearns said government compared the pay received in male-dominated jobs in 2010 with what female-dominated roles were being paid in 2011, artificially inflating what women in the province make by doing so.