



University initiative passes major hurdle

Built on international standards

All three of the major priorities of the Pacific Coast University for Workplace Health Sciences are underpinned by an international code or convention as follows:

Occupational health and safety:
ILO Convention on Health and Safety

Return to work and disability management:
ILO Code of Practice on Managing Disability in the Workplace

Rehabilitation/disability studies:
United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities



On May 14, the Pacific Coast University for Workplace Health Sciences Bill, proposed and advocated by NIDMAR, passed third and final reading in the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia with unanimous bi-partisan support.

The university, slated to be a leading global educational and research centre, will use an interdisciplinary approach to the critical issues associated with the lifelong workplace health cycle – health and safety, return to work and disability management, as well as rehabilitation.

This development follows the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement between the Government of British Columbia and NIDMAR in 2005.

"From its inception, this initiative has enjoyed an ever-increasing number of key supporters, whether they're front-line workers, executives or key decision-makers from across all stakeholder groups and the political spectrum here in Canada and around the world," says Wolfgang Zimmermann, executive director for NIDMAR.

"Consensus has been key all along, and will continue to be essential as we move forward. All of the proponents involved have recognized the value and potential impact of this initiative and supported it, while advocating its goals and objectives."

Introduced as a private bill by Ron Cantelon, MLA Nanaimo-Parksville, and seconded by Scott Fraser, MLA Alberni-Qualicum, the initiative was a true bi-partisan effort.

"The Liberal caucus was very enthusiastic – I can tell you support was 100 percent. Two ministers in particular were very supportive," notes Cantelon. "Minister of Advanced Education Murray Coell and Minister of Employment and Income Assistance Claude Richmond were both key in shepherding this past the hurdles."

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Ninety-two member states and the European community have signed a landmark treaty at the United Nations that aims to improve the lives of the world's estimated 650 million people — about 10 percent of the world's population — who live with disabilities.

Section 27 of the convention deals explicitly with employment issues, including job retention and return to work.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, said that the drive and commitment of the disability community was the greatest impetus behind the treaty's content and relatively rapid adoption.

Cantelon says that supporting the university seems to happen automatically once people are aware of the status quo.

"Three hundred thousand disabled people in BC are of working age, but 55 percent of them are not in the workforce. Many have university degrees, skills and training, and they are just not working when they could be," says Cantelon.

NDP MLA Scott Fraser, who has been a supporter and promoter of this initiative since taking office, noted the united support for this bill especially from his constituency of Alberni-Qualicum. There, workplace accidents, particularly in the forest industry, are only too well known.

Supporting the bill on behalf of the official opposition, he worked closely with Cantelon to get it through, noting that the initiative transcends politics — and more.

"Passing this bill represents the formal dismissing of partisanship between labour and industry, and between both sides of the House," he says. "This kind of example was already laid out for us. There is a unity factor that seems to come with NIDMAR. We see it at the level of the board of directors — it's cooperation between groups that don't always see eye-to-eye on issues, and they've obviously all come together on this."

A leader in workplace health

"Coming together" was vital in getting the bill passed. It's also integral to the structure and purpose of Pacific Coast University for Workplace Health Sciences in better prevention and better workplace management of disability-related issues.

Canadian director for the United Steelworkers, Ken Neumann, is co-chair of the university governance board and a long-time NIDMAR board member. Representing 280,000 workers, he understands the impact workplace injuries can have, and the difference the new university can make.

"By having an educational facility focusing on consensus between labour and management, the hope is that more and more people will turn towards this approach and look for graduates from this program to get involved in health and safety, return to work and disability management," he says. A key result will be better prevention of injuries.

Fellow university board co-chair and long-time NIDMAR board member, Canfor Human Resources vice-president, Trev James, sees similar benefits — and more.

"My vision includes that it will be a leader in disability management research and teaching, and ultimately make BC and Canada a leader in integrating people with disabilities back into the workplace," he says. He also hopes that the university will attract the very best researchers and scholars.



Proud university supporters: (L to R) Minister of Employment and Income Assistance Claude Richmond; MLA Scott Fraser; Canadian director for the United Steelworkers, Ken Neumann; NIDMAR executive director, Wolfgang Zimmermann; director of Public Affairs for Canfor, Lee Coonfer; MLA Ron Cantelon; and Minister of Advanced Education Murray Coell.

"This is a win for everybody," notes Dr. James Lunney, Conservative MP for Nanaimo-Alberni, who has been a long-time supporter of NIDMAR and the university initiative. He has been instrumental in securing more than \$120,000 in federal grants for the development of curriculum, business plans and architectural drawings for the university.

"I'm particularly keen to see this facility established because I know that with the success of the NIDMAR program now recognized around the world, if Canadians don't lay claim to this, then someone else will. Now the next stage for us is to establish this centre of excellence through the university that will anchor our position as the global leader in this realm."

For more details on this initiative, please visit the Government of British Columbia website at www.leg.bc.ca or contact wolfgang@nidmar.ca.