

## Building a Culture of Accommodation Through Innovation and Leadership



The British Columbia government, in 2021, announced a Workforce Development Grant to the National Institute of Disability Management and Research (NIDMAR) which provides BC residents and workplaces across all public and private sectors with a range of supports designed to improve Return to Work and Disability Management knowledge, programs and practices.

While the healthcare sector broadly has traditionally faced significant accommodation challenges, the onset and potential long-term consequences of COVID 19 have dramatically exacerbated these challenges which have had major corollary impacts through healthcare employee fatigue, burn out, etc.

It is within this context that the British Columbia Nurses Union (BCNU) and NIDMAR have entered into a unique cost-shared secondment agreement designed to allow Lani deHek, the BCNU Manager for Occupational Health & Safety and Disability Management, to support this unique initiative on a full-time basis, working with NIDMAR.

"I am very grateful for BCNU's support in facilitating this secondment and hope that through the development of innovative accommodation solutions in our broad range of healthcare facilities, we will be able to contribute in a concrete way, to the successful job retention for nurses who acquire a mental or physical health impairment" said Lani deHek, "while also strengthening collaborative opportunities through our Enhanced Disability Management Program (EDMP) which in turn can also provide valuable potential solutions for other sectors of our society."

"BCNU is proud to support this important work through the secondment agreement for Ms. deHek" said Aman Grewal, BCNU President. "Through her leadership, BCNU has worked in conjunction with healthcare employers through the EDMP to support ill or injured nurses to stay at work or return to work through early intervention and accommodation, and we look to build on that with this initiative."

Noting the serious nursing shortage and impact of the pandemic on nurses' physical and mental health, Ms. Grewal added, "We need to find creative accommodation solutions to keep nurses connected to the workplace. It is also significant that we share our learnings with other organizations so that disabled workers across the province may benefit from collaborative solutions in the accommodation process to maintain equitable and gainful attachment to the workforce."

People with disabilities are disproportionately affected by much higher poverty and unemployment rates than almost all other sectors in our society. As over 80% of mental and physical health impairments occur during someone's working life, effective accommodation efforts made by workplaces can play a pivotal role in workers maintaining, what are often good quality jobs, rather than entering the disability social security system (whether public or private) and all of the associated obstacles of trying to successfully re-enter the workforce at a later stage.

"I look forward to seeing the results of NIDMAR's work over the next three years," said Parliamentary Secretary for Accessibility, Dan Coulter. "People who experience mental or physical health impairments will be supported to safely return to work, and employers will have an opportunity to learn about disability management through this Workforce Development Agreement initiative."

"While we have had great initial support in the roll-out of the Building a Culture of Accommodation initiative" said Wolfgang Zimmermann, Executive Director of NIDMAR, "we are very confident that through this much valued partnership with BCNU, we'll not only be able to significantly expand the workplace reach for the various supports available, but also learn valuable lessons which will assist in reducing the number of workers losing their workforce attachment due to a disabling impairment in British Columbia's health care sector and beyond."

For further details on this initiative, please contact NIDMAR at [nidmar@nidmar.ca](mailto:nidmar@nidmar.ca)