

The BC Human Rights Coalition – Who We Are

The British Columbia Human Rights Coalition (the Coalition) is a community-based organization whose objective is to better human rights conditions in B.C. through advocacy, education, and law reform. We are a non-profit organization governed by a board of directors and registered as a charitable society.

- The Coalition is the only organization in B.C. and, to our knowledge, the only organization in Canada, that focuses exclusively on providing a full range of integrated services to its clientele in the area of human rights law and policy.
- The Coalition's Executive Director and Senior Advocate each have over 18 years experience working in the area of human rights.
- Unique among educational programs offered in human rights law, the Coalition's programs cover all aspects and all angles of human rights law and are provided to all sectors.
- A unique component of our advocacy service is our ability to design and deliver components of settlement offers, such as the development of a human rights policy or employee education in human rights.
- The Society's services are offered province wide and are regularly accessed by those from outside the lower mainland region.

“We provide an opportunity for better understanding of human rights issues and encourage dialogue on human rights matters from diverse points of view”

Let the numbers speak - Since 1982, the Coalition has been the community leader in human rights education and consultation, advocacy, and law reform.

- We have pioneered the provision of innovative, effective human rights education, consultation and investigation services to all sectors. Since 1997, we have provided education to over 10,000 people from a variety of sectors. We have consulted with over 2000 groups and individuals in this same period informing them of our services and assisting employers in developing policies on human rights, as well as training them in the administration of those policies.
- We have assisted over 1500 individuals and organizations with human rights complaints through the intake, investigation, and up to the hearing stage of their complaints since the inception of the B.C. Human Rights Commission (1997). Between July 2002 and March 31, 2003, our pilot clinic carried 161 complaints that had been referred by the Commission to the BC Human Rights Tribunal for hearing.
- We have supported our clients in successful human rights complaints that have greatly expanded human rights law. We have done this work before the B.C. Human Rights



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Council, the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, and the Supreme Court of Canada.

- Our lobbying efforts have led to significant changes to both the substantive and administrative components of provincial and federal human and equality rights legislation.
- The Coalition's annual operating budget increased significantly in fiscal 2002/03 as a result of our pilot clinic project. Total operating costs were \$422,845.00 and our staff increased from 3.6 to 9 FTE.

“The B.C. Human Rights Coalition – The group with experience.”

Advocacy: The Coalition is the most comprehensive and experienced advocacy resource for individuals and other service providers in B.C. Our advocacy services are offered by experienced lay advocates and are supervised by qualified and committed lawyers. Our advocacy services include the provision of:

- legal information and advice for people who experience discrimination,
- technical assistance with filing framing formal complaints of discrimination made under either the provincial or federal human rights legislation,
- research of case law and the provision of opinion letters as to the merits of a claim,
- representation through early stages of the complaints process, including settlement discussions and negotiations, mediation and some expedited hearing,
- design and production of settlement offers and agreements,
- initiation of formal disclosure procedures and assistance in preparing clients for evidence production,
- assistance to other lawyers who represent both respondents and complainants, providing them with legal research and information about administrative matters.

“People deserve to have their human rights complaints dealt with fairly. We work to help untangle the red tape and to ensure our clients are dealt with fairly and professionally within the system that exists to protect and uphold our human rights.”

Education: The Coalition has pioneered the provision of innovative, effective human rights educational programs that have a preventative effect on human rights complaints. We tailor programs in order to meet the needs of various sectors and student groups. Our educational programs include a range of training, from introductory to intensive, on a variety of topics including:

- the basics of human rights law and policy,
- workplace discrimination - what every organization needs to know,
- harassment investigation - designed to train investigators in human rights harassment,
- duty to accommodate - what the law says and how to keep all parties informed, and
- compliance education - where education of a department or workplace forms part of a human rights remedy.

“We are committed to working with all sectors. We believe that it is possible to remedy discrimination only if everybody participates.”

Law Reform: We have been involved in all administrative and substantive review processes regarding human and equality rights legislation in B.C. since our inception. We have also provided briefing and submissions on the majority of similar reviews taking place at the federal level. We have also provided support, leadership, and representation on a number of individual complaints that have significantly advanced human rights law including:

- *Dupuis v. Her Majesty in Right of the Province of B.C. et al* – 1993 – a sexual harassment case that clarified the definition of consent,
- *Burton v. Chalifour Bros. Construction Ltd.* – 1994 – a sexual harassment case that increased the available remedies for victims of harassment,
- *Guzman v. Dr. and Mrs. T* – 1997 – a sexual harassment case that defined the employers responsibility for the work environment of live-in foreign domestic workers, and
- *Zutter v. British Columbia* – 1995 – where the B.C. Court of Appeal ruled that the Commission cannot dismiss a complaint for narrow reasons.

“We are dedicated to promoting strengthened human rights throughout B.C. and Canada”

The Coalition is also actively involved in a variety of special projects that address specific needs around human rights issues. For example, in partnership with Multiculturalism B.C., the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women’s Services and the Victim Services Division we produced a manual to give service providers – both in and out of government – access to the information, skills and resources required to support victims of racism, and to respond effectively to issues of racism that arise in the community. We have worked on many more projects in conjunction with a number of community groups and governmental agencies including the Vancouver Alliance Against the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth, West Coast Leaf, the Canadian Anti-Racism Education and Research Society, the United Nations Association, the B.C. Human Rights Commission, the Law Courts Education Society, and Canadian Heritage.

The Coalition also publishes and distributes materials throughout British Columbia relevant to human rights issues through its publications (Human Rights: Your Rights to Know, Sexual Harassment, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: A Guide for Canadians). We have recently received special funding from the Law Foundation of British Columbia and the Notary Foundation of British Columbia to create a comprehensive web site on human rights issues and resources. This site will be launched in September 2003.