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## **Manitoba Human Rights Commission's 2013 Annual Report released**

### **Some concerns continue and new ones arise**

The 2013 Manitoba Human Rights Commission's Annual Report identifies sexual harassment as an ongoing and troubling issue.

*"In last year's report the Commission expressed concern regarding the number of sexual harassment cases requiring determination by a board of adjudication. We were, and still are, concerned, not only with the unusually high number of cases, but also the nature of the sexual harassment itself. The continued existence of sexual harassment in the workplace is unacceptable and worrisome."* 2013 Annual Report

The Chairperson of the Manitoba Human Rights board of Commissioners Yvonne Peters says, "Despite the Commission's education efforts and the passage of time, there remains a lack of awareness or an unwillingness to understand the consequences of harassment."

Ms Peters also says the public wants more awareness in specific human rights issues but the Commission lacks the resources and is stretched to its maximum. "We have extremely limited resources to invest in education," she says. In addition, complainants and respondents now are waiting longer than they should for a resolution and, until the resource issue is addressed, we will continue to have difficulty maintaining awareness, outreach and education programs while dealing with the growing number of complaints in our system."

The release of the 2013 report coincides with a recently released 2014 Board of Adjudication decision which awarded \$15,000 in damages to dignity, feelings and self respect, over \$1,6000 in lost wages and \$5,000 in exemplary damages to a woman who was sexually harassed in Winkler Manitoba. This decision marks a significant increase in the amount of damages awarded for such complaints. The 2013 report refers to another complaint where an adjudicator found that a customer had sexually harassed a Winnipeg store employee and her employer did not take reasonable steps to stop the harassment. In that complaint the adjudicator awarded the complainant \$7,750 in damages, the highest human rights damage award in the history of Manitoba at that time.

Recently, ancestry has emerged as a new concern. Over the last three years, complaints based on ancestry have continued to rise: 8 per cent in 2011, 14 per cent in 2012, and 17 per cent in 2013.

*“Some of these complaints are filed by Aboriginal people, but more than half are not. The increase in complaints is somewhat disturbing as the existence of racism in Canada is frequently denied.”* 2013 Annual Report

Commission received 49 complaints based on ancestry; 30 were in the area of employment; 15 in services; and 4 in rental. Just under one half of the 49 complaints were from Aboriginal people.

The number of complaints based on disability remains the highest at 42 per cent of all complaints, the majority due to a lack of reasonable accommodation in the workplace.

The report acknowledges that the Commission has succeeded in resolving difficult and complex systemic complaints, citing the example of a mediated settlement, which secured additional funding for American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation for Deaf amateur athletes participating in community sport activities.

The report also identifies the growing use of service animals (usually dogs) by Manitobans with a variety of disabilities. The Commission is aware that service providers, employers and rental property owners require information on their obligation to accommodate and provide access to persons who use service animals.

“In September and October of 2014 the Commission embarked on a series of public consultations seeking input into this evolving area of human rights, the results of which will be included in a report to be released early in the New Year,” says Ms Peters.

General highlights of the 2013 Annual Report include:

Intake staff responded to 4200 inquiries in 2013. Of these inquiries, 282 resulted in registered human rights complaints. An additional 100 files were opened and either resolved through the Commission’s pre-complaint process or not pursued or not formally registered until 2014.

Approximately 140 people attended Commission seminars, which were held mainly in Winnipeg and Brandon. In addition, another 375 people attended on-site seminars with Commission staff. Outreach presentations about human rights protections by the outreach officer and other staff were delivered to an additional 2,225 people.

The 2013 Annual Report can be viewed on the Commission’s website [www.manitobahumanrights.ca](http://www.manitobahumanrights.ca).

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