

# Stand UP for SENIORS CARE

## FACT SHEET #5

### HEU's advocacy history

#### Part of the solution: a tradition of caring for seniors

HEU's efforts to improve standards in seniors' care date back to the 1970s when the union first organized staff working in B.C.'s private nursing home sector. At that time, HEU successfully exposed a host of problems affecting residents in care – including neglect and low-staffing levels – and demonstrated the critical link between poor working conditions for staff and substandard caring conditions for residents.

In response, the government of the day established the 1978 *Long-Term Care Act*, developed funding guidelines for staffing, and introduced financial and expert assistance to support not-for-profit organizations to build long-term care residential facilities.

As acuity levels rose throughout the 1990s, however, so did concerns from our members about their ability to provide safe, quality care. Advocacy efforts to improve staffing levels once again became front and centre, and in 2001 bargaining, HEU successfully negotiated an agreement with the provincial government to add 300 new Residential Care Aide positions in long-term care.

#### The truth is...

Shortly after taking office in 2001, the newly elected Liberal government legislated measures to facilitate long-term care residential closures, privatization, and contracting out of care and support services (*Bill 29* and *Bill 94*).

These changes have resulted in repeated layoffs of care staff in some for-profit facilities – disrupting continuity of care for residents – and have driven down wages for many health care workers, fuelling a recruitment and retention crisis throughout the long-term care sector.

Despite these setbacks, HEU has continued to advocate for improved working and caring conditions and, wherever possible, works with government to improve care standards.

In addition to providing input into such legislative areas as the *Community Care and Assisted Living Act* and regulations, HEU is an active member of B.C.'s Health Service's Nursing Directorate. At HEU's request, government established the Residential Care Policy Committee, where union members work in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and their health authorities to address staffing, work environment issues, and training standards for front-line staff working in residential care.

Currently, HEU is supporting members to identify the gap between the care needed and the hours of care provided to residents in an effort to increase staffing levels and improve care quality. HEU has also published numerous research reports available at <[www.standupforseniorscare.ca](http://www.standupforseniorscare.ca)>.

#### OUR SOLUTIONS

- Provide mechanisms for staff, residents and family members to provide input into seniors' care policy.
- Mandate staffing levels and training standards for front-line staff working in residential care.
- Implement measures that will improve working conditions and reduce the risk of violence and injuries in residential care.

