



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

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Make hospital contractors pay family-supporting wages to cleaners and dietary workers – poll

More than 90 per cent of British Columbians say B.C.'s health authorities should require corporate cleaning and food service contractors to pay family-supporting wages to their workers, according to polling numbers released today by the Hospital Employees' Union.

Four health authorities have \$640 million in contracts with the multinational corporations – Compass, Sodexo and Aramark – to clean hospitals and feed patients. Most of their workers earn about \$13 an hour and receive minimal benefits.

The majority of the commercial contracts will expire within the next year. But significantly, 81 per cent of those polled say that no public dollars should go to contractors who don't pay decent wages.

The polling numbers are being released as HEU launches a Living Wage Campaign, which calls on health authorities to be accountable for the wages and working conditions of cleaning and food service workers employed by its contractors in B.C. hospitals.

HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy says the provincial government and its health authorities cannot absolve themselves of their role in creating inadequate working conditions and wage rates for more than 3,500 B.C. hospital workers employed by foreign corporations.

"Health authorities must be accountable for the wages and working conditions of all workers employed in the health care facilities that they operate, whether they contract out the work or not," says Darcy.

HEU has been working with its members and reaching out to community and multicultural groups, faith-based organizations and other unions to support its call for health authorities to make living wages a condition of any commercial contracts they sign with corporate contractors.

Similar policies have been adopted by jurisdictions in the U.S. and U.K. requiring corporations to pay living wages as a condition of receiving public contracts. According to the poll, 78 per cent of the public would support a similar living wage policy for B.C.'s health authorities.

Darcy says the health authorities' own medical health officers have highlighted poverty and income inequality as key social determinants of population health.

"Ironically, workers in their own facilities can't afford basics like nutritious food, or decent housing," says Darcy. "Instead, they start their day exhausted from working two jobs or taking overtime shifts to make ends meet. That's not good for workers' families or for patient care and it's time for health authorities to be accountable for the dire situation in their own facilities."

The telephone survey of 607 British Columbians was conducted for the HEU by Viewpoints Research between March 9 and 15 and is considered accurate to within +/- 4.1 per cent, 19 times out of 20.

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Two (2) backgrounders attached. More information at www.bclivingwage.org

