



New book calls co-operatives and health care a healthy match

“Community-based health co-ops can use government funding to deliver programs that reflect the needs of real people and respect the principles of workplace democracy,” reports *Co-operating for health*, a new book produced as part of HEU’s Building Union Support for Community Health Care Co-operatives project.

With an increased shift to privatizing and contracting out public services across Canada, it’s more imperative than ever for social systems to collaborate to counteract the negative effects of government cuts and closures in their communities.

In British Columbia, a group of HEU women – whose long-term care facility jobs were privatized in 2004 – stepped up to the plate and formed Care Connection Co-operative, providing home support services to seniors and people with disabilities in Mission.

As former union activists, the women say they are committed to ensuring decent wages, providing flexible scheduling and good working conditions within their co-op – something they now have control over as their own “boss”.

But they’re not the first to take the initiative. Saskatchewan and Quebec have been pioneers in creating co-ops to fill voids in social and economic services – most notably Saskatchewan’s co-op health care clinics and Medicare stemming back to the 1960s.

Although, historically, there has been friction between unions and co-operatives, the book points out that unions – like co-ops – combine “the spirit of self-help with the power of collective action: People working together to accomplish what they cannot do alone.”

Co-operating for health cites many examples of positive outcomes when these social movements unite, including the successful organizing – mostly by CUPE – of four out of five health care co-op clinics in Saskatchewan.

For copies of this book, please contact Marcy Cohen, HEU Research Director, HEU Provincial Office, 5000 North Fraser Way, Burnaby, B.C. V5J 5M3 or by email mcohen@heu.org.