



News Release

THE HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Nass Valley health employer targets health care workers' wages

If health employers in the Nass Valley have their way at the bargaining table, Nisga'a health care workers would earn wages far below the standard in other northern communities, says the Hospital Employees' Union.

Last week, the union requested a federal conciliator to assist in settling a new collective agreement with the Nisga'a Valley Health Board (NVHB) after talks broke down. The NVHB has told workers to take a \$2.50 an hour wage rollback or face massive layoffs.

The Nisga'a workers have also provided their bargaining committee with a 94 per cent strike mandate.

"It's puzzling that the health board would undermine Nisga'a health services by paying the lowest health care wages in the region," says HEU's assistant secretary-business manager Zorica Bosancic. "Over the years, we've worked really hard for fair wages and decent working conditions that support quality health care services in Nisga'a territory. Let's not turn back the clock."

The HEU contract – which expired on March 31, 2005 – covers about 50 cultural community health representatives, alcohol and drug counsellors; dental, technical, clerical, housekeeping and maintenance workers who provide front-line health care services in New Aiyansh, Gitwinksihlkw, Greenville and Kincolith.

In communities already geographically isolated – where access to high quality, community-based health services is critical – cuts to hours of operation also demanded by the employer are a move in the wrong direction, says Bosancic.

In 2001, an historic first contract was signed between NVHB and Nisga'a HEU health care workers, blending traditional contract protections with others that recognize unique Nisga'a beliefs and customs.

HEU also represents First Nations health care staff in the Gits'xan Health Authority, the Skidegate Band Council in northwestern B.C., and the St. Mary's Band in the East Kootenay.

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