



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

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AUGUST 30, 2021

Province reverses privatization of cleaning and dietary work in B.C. hospitals

More than 4,500 workers to be brought in-house ending 20-year privatization policy that drove down wages for women and workers of colour, and fragmented the health care team

[Vancouver, B.C.] Health Minister Adrian Dix today announced that privatized hospital cleaning and dietary workers will be brought back in-house as health authority employees. The Hospital Employees' Union says the move will help restore fairness and stability in the health care system.

“Reuniting the health care team is a giant step towards restoring equity and justice for health care workers and repairing the damage done to health care delivery,” says HEU secretary-business manager Meena Brisard.

In 2002, the former B.C. Liberal government introduced legislation that stripped health care workers' collective agreements of job security provisions and excluded them from the full protection of provincial labour laws.

Thousands of health care workers – mostly women – were fired as health authorities contracted out hospital services. Those workers were invited to reapply for their jobs at half the wages by the corporations that won lucrative service contracts.

Privatization of this work has had an outsized impact on the economic security of women (more than four out of five of the impacted workforce) and racialized workers.

Today, they earn less than they did during the SARS epidemic 18 years ago.

In 2018, the B.C. legislature voted unanimously to repeal the 2002 law that enabled contracting out, paving the way for today's announcement.

“This is a significant act of solidarity with a group of workers who've been pushed to the margins by 20 years of privatization,” said Brisard.

“It's a move that will improve recruitment and retention rates for these critical jobs, and will ensure greater worker and patient safety.”

There are 21 commercial contracts to be repatriated under today's announcement representing more than 4,500 regular and casual workers (2,900 full-time equivalents). HEU reached an agreement with public health employers and government earlier this year on a labour adjustment framework for the transfer of workers to health authorities.

HEU is B.C.'s largest health union representing more than 50,000 workers in various health occupations and settings, including more than 4,500 contracted hospital support workers currently employed by multinational corporations under contract to Vancouver Coastal Health, Vancouver Island Health, Fraser Health and the Provincial Health Services authorities.

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