



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

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Seniors' Advocate links paid sick leave and contracting out to largest COVID outbreaks in long-term care

HEU calls on government to restore common standards across long-term care and assisted living including a ban on contracting out, and minimum 18 paid sick days a year

B.C.'s largest health care union is calling for more paid sick leave and an end to sub-contracting of staff in seniors' care homes in response to B.C. Seniors' Advocate Isobel Mackenzie's investigation into some of the biggest COVID-19 outbreaks in this sector.

In a report released by her office today, Mackenzie links the lack of paid sick leave coverage and the contracting out of care staff to some of the largest COVID-19 outbreaks in B.C.'s long-term care and assisted living homes.

Hospital Employees' Union secretary-business manager Meena Brisard says the investigation's findings confirm that the lack of paid sick leave left health care workers vulnerable and undermined public health efforts to control the spread of COVID-19 in the province's care homes.

"Twenty years ago, most government funded care homes – public, non-profit and for-profit -- provided 18 paid sick days annually with no contracting out under a common labour agreement," says Brisard.

"But privatization and contracting out under the previous government left us a fragmented seniors' care system, with uneven standards, and that put care home residents and workers at even higher risk to this deadly virus.

"We thank the seniors' advocate for her investigation – and her acknowledgement of the stress that this pandemic has placed on residents and their families – and on the courageous and committed health care workers who have been on the front line of this pandemic.

"Let's help them stay safe by restoring a level-playing field for working and caring conditions across seniors' care including 18 paid sick days a year."

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Mackenzie found that more than half of contracted for-profit care home operators provided six or fewer paid sick days a year. All health-authority-operated sites and 44 per cent of non-profit-operated sites provided 18 days of paid sick days a year.

HEU's internal polling of members across health care indicates that one out of six members exhausted their paid sick leave during the pandemic.

HEU has been calling for the restoration of common wages, benefits and working conditions across seniors' care. And Premier John Horgan included this objective in the mandate letter he provided health minister Adrian Dix last November.

More than 20,000 HEU members work directly in seniors' care homes and services.