

Media Release



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Budget 2022: Health care system strained by COVID-19 will struggle to deliver services in face of changing demographics, increased costs

[VICTORIA, B.C.] Budget 2022 commits funds for training more care aides and reversing the privatization of critical health care services, says the Hospital Employees' Union.

But B.C.'s largest health care union is concerned that health care workers will struggle to deliver services to British Columbians with planned spending in future years falling short of increased cost pressures resulting from a growing and aging population, and inflation.

"Our health care system has been strained by the pandemic, and front-line health care workers are exhausted. They need help," says HEU's secretary-business manager Meena Brisard.

"We need to respond with significant investments in training and hiring new staff, and making sure that existing health care workers receive the support they need to remain on the front lines.

"Expanding the Health Career Access Program to train more care aides is making a huge difference, but there are few details in today's budget on how government will support a robust health human resource strategy targeted at the many other critical health care occupations."

The budget includes 6.6 per cent increase to core health spending in 2022/23 but holds planned spending increases in future years below the levels needed to support health care delivery in the face of a growing and aging population, and inflation.

"We strongly support the Premier's efforts to secure a higher level of support from the federal government for health care spending," says Brisard. "But we also need to plan today for the health care system we need in the years ahead."

Budget 2022 includes \$231 million over the fiscal plan to support the ongoing costs of bringing more than 4,000 privatized hospital dietary and housekeeping staff (2,900 FTEs) back in-house by the end of the year.

"Reversing privatization provides stable employment and higher wages for a workforce that is highly racialized and overwhelmingly female," says Brisard. "This is a solid investment in employment equity and it will help retain skilled workers and improve health care delivery."

The budget continues to provide support for the levelling up of wages in seniors' care that supports the Provincial Health Officer's order limiting workers in this sector to single-sites. But there are no details on how government will deliver on its election commitment to standardize wages, benefits and working conditions in the sector over the long term.

HEU represents more than 50,000 health care workers who provide a broad range of care and support services in hospitals, care homes, community services, First Nations health centres, corporate offices, and throughout the supply chain.

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