



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

# NEWSLETTER

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## Building solidarity and inclusion focus of HEU equity conference

Taking the next steps towards building equity and inclusion in the union were on the minds of more than 200 HEU members, facilitators and staff who gathered March 1-3 for the union's 2022 equity conference.

Participants took part in workshops, elected several members to the union's six equity standing committees, and participated in large plenary discussions.

Much of the discussion focused on HEU's multi-year Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Project, and especially on the decision at HEU's last convention to elect six new diversity vice-presidents to the union's Provincial Executive later this year.

Speakers included B.C. Human Rights Commissioner Kasari Govender, CUPE Manitoba president and equity activist Gina McKay, NDP MLA Rachna Singh, and Indigenous actor and physician Dr. Evan Adams. They also heard from the officers of the union.

Govender, B.C.'s first human rights commissioner since the office was re-established by the provincial NDP government, spoke about the Commission's work including a survey on hatred during the pandemic and how experiencing or witnessing incidents has impacted British Columbians.

HEU president Barb Nederpel reflected on HEU's achievements in fighting for equity.

"Our union has a long and proud history of being pioneers in the labour movement, fighting for social justice, advocating for legislative changes, and our equity work has been unparalleled," said Nederpel.

Nederpel also spoke about the rise in the far-right movement cloaked in anti-vaccine protests, how it has targeted health care workers, and included racist, Islamophobic and anti-Semitic undercurrents.

"We must do everything we can to fight these far-right, hateful views from spreading in our communities."

"These symbols and racist acts impact people of colour in profound ways that I can't begin to understand as a white woman. But those of us with privilege must be prepared to step up and be visible and loud in our opposition to this racism and hate."

HEU's financial secretary Betty Valenzuela described for participants the challenges she faced as an immigrant, the freedoms Canadians often take for granted – including freedom of speech – and how she recently experienced blatant racism as a result of growing anti-Asian hate that surfaced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“As a woman of colour, I know what it’s like firsthand to experience racism, harassment and discrimination,” said Valenzuela. “And unfortunately, it’s not something that goes away. It’s a lived experience every single day. It’s lifelong.”

“We, as members of equity-seeking groups, always have to work extra hard to prove ourselves, and to advance as leaders. It’s an uphill battle. But I can assure you, it’s certainly worth the reward when you accomplish your goals and dreams.”

The union’s secretary-business manager Meena Brisard also spoke about the barriers, racism and discrimination she has experienced back to her days as a young rank-and-file union activist.

“I survived because people mentored, empowered and encouraged me. They believed in me and gave me a chance. They helped move me forward rather than holding me back. That’s how I developed as a leader. And that’s what allyship looks like.”

“How do we build allyship within our own union? We do it by talking, by listening, and educating one another.”

Brisard said that convention delegates decision to include six diversity vice-presidents is a significant move towards having a more inclusive union.

“We’re committed to actively doing the real work of advancing equity in our union. And we’re doing it together.”

Participants at the equity conference also elected members to the union’s six equity standing committees – 2-Spirit, Women & Non-binary; Ethnic Diversity; Indigenous Peoples; People with Disabilities; Pink Triangle; and Young Workers.

The remaining members of these committees will be appointed. Interested members can find out more about this process at <https://www.heu.org/equity-standing-committees> including how to apply. The deadline is March 31.

*March 3, 2022*