



Provincial Health Officer issues emergency order restricting long-term care workers to a single site

Order prohibits operators/sub-contractors from firing employees who are directed to work at other sites, and provides for protection of benefits; government to raise wages to rates in Facilities and Nurses master agreements

B.C.'s Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry used her sweeping emergency powers under the Public Health Act to move towards restricting long-term care and assisted living workers to single sites right across the province.

Dr. Henry issued two Orders today.

The first Order provides health authority medical health officers (MHO) with the power to restrict long-term care workers to work at one site. This Order also provides the MHO with the ability to make exceptions in order to ensure safe staffing levels.

Significantly, this Order also prohibits long-term care operators from terminating or penalizing staff, and provides for the continuance of benefits should staff be directed to work for another operator.

Government has committed to raising wage rates at sites impacted by the single site order to match rates in the Facilities and Nurses master agreements. It's expected that all sites in the province will be impacted by the single-worksite designation within days.

A second Order directs employers and operators across long-term care, assisted living and mental health facilities to provide detailed employee information by the March 28. This information will be used to centrally allocate staff to single sites while ensuring that no site is left short-staffed.

Public health officials are taking this step to stem the spread of COVID-19 between health care sites. In the past two weeks, COVID-19 outbreaks have been declared in a number of care homes in the Lower Mainland, and eleven residents have passed away at the Lynn Valley Care Centre, the site of the first outbreak.

... more

Page two

HEU has been working with government and the Health Employers Association of B.C. (HEABC) to develop a plan to implement the expected orders so that there is staff coverage across the system, while protecting the income of workers who may depend on two or more jobs to make ends meet.

“Dr. Henry’s direction is necessary for the protection of vulnerable residents, and for those who care for them,” says HEU secretary-business manager Jennifer Whiteside.

“Our challenge is to make sure that her directions can be implemented in a manner that does not leave some sites short of staff in a system where the wide disparity in wages force many workers to hold multiple jobs.

“We have advocated forcefully with employers, government and other health unions to ensure that staffing decisions will be made centrally and that wages will be raised to Facilities and Nurses master rates for the duration of the pandemic or until the Order is lifted or amended,” says Whiteside.

The first Order will impact all workers in long-term care including those working for non-profit and for-profit operators, as well as non-union operators and subcontractors.

The single-site directive is likely to be expanded to all parts of the province and in addition to long-term care will include assisted living and mental health facilities (including subcontractors).

Workers will be able to use a mobile “app” to rank their preference for which site they would like to work at, but the final decision of the central staffing body will be based on safe resident care.

“There’s no question that there will many bumps in the road in the very short period of time that we have to implement the direction of Dr. Henry. But her direction is important if we are to protect vulnerable residents and our members from COVID-19.

“We have secured a number of principles in this arrangement to protect workers income and hours, contained in Appendix A of the second Order.

“I want to acknowledge the high level of anxiety that many HEU members are feeling generally, and also in relation to this massive staffing change ordered by public health officials. We will get through this challenging time together,” says Whiteside.

Members will have many questions about the implementation of this new staffing mechanism. Please watch our website for more information.

March 26, 2020