



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 19, 2008

Budget contains few details on big ideas for health care

Health authorities will struggle to provide front-line health services as government pursues competitive funding model for hospitals

[**Victoria**] After putting health care planning on hold for a year to have a conversation on health with citizens, the B.C. government has revealed little about its grand plans for health changes in its 2008 budget, says the Hospital Employees' Union.

And while the B.C. government has restored three-year budget commitments to its struggling health authorities, that's unlikely to pull B.C. out of its sixth place position among the provinces in terms of its per capita support for health care.

In addition, the budget fails to deliver either adequate resources or any details on how government will tackle the real sustainability crisis facing health care – a crippling shortage of skilled health care workers.

“This budget represents a lost opportunity for health care and B.C. patients,” says HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy. “We should be scaling up proven, public solutions for better health care that are being carried out on a limited scale right now.

“Instead, government is committed to a vague notion of transformational change but there are few details about their plans in this budget.”

Darcy says British Columbians should be particularly concerned about a plan to move towards so-called ‘patient-centred funding’ where hospitals could compete with each other for patients.

In the U.K., this model has created a new market for private clinics to profit from public health dollars by cherry-picking patients who require lower cost procedures. This has left many public hospitals unable to sustain more complex procedures and programs for patients with chronic conditions.

And there, administrative costs have ballooned from four per cent to 15 per cent of the health budget as health authorities are now forced to regulate hospital competition and track patients and procedures.

“Instead of stamping dollar signs on the head of every patient that walks into an ER and forcing hospitals into wasteful competition with each other, our government should be encouraging collaboration and proven, public innovations,” says Darcy.

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Backgrounder (one page) attached





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BACKGROUND

Budget 2008: The real sustainability crisis facing health care is the shortage of skilled health care workers

THE GOVERNMENT'S PLAN to entrench sustainability in provincial medicare legislation is based on its claim that current health spending is out of control. But provincial health expenditures have been stable compared to the overall economy, and B.C.'s per capita support to health care has fallen in comparison to other Canadian provinces.

B.C. health spending facts (*all figures from Canadian Institute for Health Information*):

- Since 2001, the B.C. government has **fallen from second to sixth place** among the provinces in its per capita support for health care. In 2007, the B.C. government's **support for health care is forecast to have increased less than any other province.**
- **B.C.'s spending on health care has remained relatively stable** as a proportion of the provincial economy over the last 16 years – about seven per cent of GDP.
- Private health spending on a per capita basis in B.C. has outstripped provincial per capita spending on health care since 2000 (54 per cent vs. 39 per cent).

Future shortages of workers the real threat to health care sustainability

Last week's throne speech included plans to expand job duties for existing health professionals but **no details on how to better coordinate the training and recruitment of new workers.**

Without more workers, expanded duties will just mean more overtime for already overburdened staff. It's a serious problem that puts health care delivery at risk.

- Vancouver Coastal Health predicts major shortages by 2015 including a 25 per cent shortfall for job categories represented by HEU in hospitals and long-term care facilities; and a 16 per cent shortfall for positions in community health.
- That includes a seven per cent shortfall for care aides; five per cent shortfall for community health workers; 16 per cent shortfall for licensed practical nurses; and a 20 per cent shortfall in unit clerks.
- Budget 2008 indicates funding for 900 training spaces for health care professionals **but** the shortfall in Vancouver Coastal Health alone will total more than 1,000 positions right now.

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