



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

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Throne speech puts health care on the market

The B.C. government's plan to adopt a so-called "patient-centred funding model" will put health services at risk for many British Columbians, says the Hospital Employees' Union.

The union warns that Britain's experience with this funding scheme – where public hospitals are forced to compete for patients with each other and for-profit clinics – has led to service cuts and huge administrative costs.

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

"During the health conversation, British Columbians did not call for a market-based approach to health care funding," says HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy. "They wanted this government to implement proven public solutions that will increase access and strengthen services for all.

"But instead, this government is essentially stamping a dollar sign on the head of every patient who walks into an ER and forcing hospitals into a wasteful competition with each other."

During a recent visit to this province, Britain's former health secretary Frank Dobson confirmed that forced competition has slowed down the spread of useful innovations as hospitals guard their competitive advantages. Dobson also said that costs of tracking patients and services under the market model had increased administrative costs from four per cent to 15 per cent of the health budget.

"There's a reason Canadians rejected market-based health care more than 50 years ago," says Darcy. "Our successes in health care are the product of collaboration between care providers, not competition.

"Instead of taking us back in time, this government needs to listen to British Columbians and move forward with the public innovations that have already strengthened public health care in our province."

In its response to today's Throne Speech, HEU also says:

- a plan to explore "**Independent Living Savings Accounts**" – tax-sheltered savings account for individuals to pay for their housing and health care costs in their senior years – could put seniors' care out-of-reach for those who can't afford to save for them. It could also transfer health care costs onto low- and middle-income families; and
- the promise of more support for people with developmental disabilities, children with special needs, and the prevention of violence against women requires a substantial funding commitment if the province is to reverse the negative impact of cutbacks and under-resourcing throughout the community social services sector.

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