



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

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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

