



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

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Stats Can Report: Living wage policies key to solving huge wage gap for immigrant workers, says HEU

Living wage policies are an essential tool to address the shocking gap – revealed today in a Statistics Canada report – between the wages of new-immigrant and Canadian-born workers, says the Hospital Employees' Union.

The HEU recently launched a campaign calling on health authorities to be accountable for ensuring the multinational corporations with contracts to provide cleaning and food services in public hospitals provide fair, family-supporting wages and safe working conditions.

The union's membership includes over 3,500 contracted-out hospital cleaners and food service workers; many are recent immigrants, who work two or three jobs to make ends meet and provide for their families.

Today's report showed that in 2005, men who were recent immigrants earned only 63 cents for each dollar earned by Canadian-born men, while recent immigrant women earned only 56 cents for each dollar earned by Canadian-born women.

"Our members tell us they came to Canada for a better life, expecting to be treated with dignity and respect," says HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy. "But instead, they find themselves struggling, despite the fact that their work is an essential part of infection control and patient care."

Since 2003, health authorities have handed over more than \$643 million in taxpayer dollars to Sodexo, Aramark and Compass to provide cleaning and food services in public hospitals in the Lower Mainland and Southern Vancouver Island. The three corporations currently pay their staff about \$13 an hour, with few sick days or benefits.

"Health authorities are standing by while people who work in our hospitals are unable to afford a decent quality of life like school field trips for their children, heat in their homes or a modest savings plan for their retirement," says Darcy.

Avelina Vasquez, who immigrated to Canada from the Philippines in 1991, says she had hoped a life in this country would bring more family time, an opportunity for education and less financial stress. But she says she has been unable to upgrade her skills because she is too exhausted to study, after supplementing her work as a hospital cleaner with housekeeping jobs.

"This is not what we expect when we come here," explains Vasquez. "We want to work hard and make a contribution to Canada, but we deserve to be treated fairly and earn enough to have opportunities and provide a quality life for ourselves and our families."

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