



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

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Long-term care beds must remain open on Vancouver Island to meet needs of seniors

HEU says that the health authority needs to disclose credible waitlist numbers, and come clean on any future bed closures

The Hospital Employees' Union says the Vancouver Island Health Authority must reverse its plans to close 346 long-term care beds, so that seniors who require residential care do not languish on wait lists.

HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy says closing beds makes little sense in the face of a serious province-wide shortage of long-term care beds.

"As long as frail seniors who require 24-hour residential care continue to wait at home, or in a hospital or at a facility far from family, then none of these beds should be closed," says Darcy. "We've fallen so far behind that even with the opening of new privately-operated facilities, many seniors will still be waiting to be placed in an appropriate care setting."

Statistics Canada's figures from 2005/2006 show that B.C. ranks dead last among Canadian provinces in the number of residential care beds available for its population of seniors (36.5 beds for every 1000 British Columbians aged 65 years or older compared to a Canadian average of 47.1).

The HEU says VIHA should disclose the number of seniors currently waiting to be placed in long-term care including those waiting at home, in assisted living or supportive housing, or in a hospital.

The union is also demanding that the health authority come clean on any future plans to close additional beds or facilities on Vancouver Island.

"Long-term care residents and the health care workers who look after them deserve to know if their facilities are next on VIHA's hit list," says Darcy.

"Last week, seniors and their families – and our members – were blindsided by this health authority's surprise announcement that residents would be forced to move and that workers would lose their jobs.

"VIHA's claim that they shared information about the closure of the 94-bed Cowichan Lodge as soon as possible following their decision, for example, lacks credibility," adds Darcy.

"The fact that the new private facility in Duncan stopped taking applications for workers the day before news of the closure came out shows a lack of transparency that is extremely disrespectful to health care workers in that community."

The health authority's current schedule of closures extends until June 2009, but Island communities deserve to know if this is a comprehensive list or whether further closures are planned, says Darcy.

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