



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

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Budget 2009 approach to health care lacks “bold, decisive” direction

Status quo budget represents lost opportunities and leaves B.C. behind most provinces in its commitment to health care

The Campbell Liberals' 2009 budget means B.C.'s health authorities will continue to struggle to provide health services to communities across the province.

HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy says that if British Columbians were looking for bold, decisive measures to address the looming recession through strategic investments in health care and other services, they won't find it in this budget.

“I am underwhelmed by the meekness of the government's approach at a time when British Columbians are facing the most serious threats to their economic security in a generation,” says Darcy.

Today's budget restates previously announced health funding increases to 2010/11 and extends them to 2011/12. That won't change B.C.'s poor ranking among Canadian provinces in its support for health care which has fallen from second to seventh place since 2001.

“This is a time when we should be making significant investments in social infrastructure,” adds Darcy. “In health care, we could do more than the anemic measures contained in this budget to deal with the real sustainability crisis facing health care – the growing shortage of skilled health care workers.

“As it stands, there won't be enough trained health care staff to deliver even the modest increases in services forecast in this budget. And a public sector wage freeze starting next year would just make matters worse.”

Darcy notes that health authorities will be expected to cut administrative and support services by two per cent – a move that will put front-line services that are critical to quality health care delivery such as hospital cleaning and patient food services at further risk.

B.C.'s provincial spending on health care as a percentage of the provincial GDP fell in 2008 to 7.4 per cent of GDP, down from a high 7.8 per cent of GDP in 2002, according to the Canadian Institute for Health Information.

“This government has made health care spending a scapegoat for government cuts in other areas,” says Darcy. “The truth is, the Campbell Liberals undermined other important government services in good times and they continue to do so now.”

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