



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

# NEWS RELEASE

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## Hospital housekeepers, dietary workers in FHA, VCHA return strong strike vote

*HEU calls on government contractors, Sodexo and Aramark, to get serious about negotiating issues critical to clean, safe hospitals*

Approximately 2,400 hospital housekeepers and dietary workers, employed in the Fraser Health and Vancouver Coastal Health authorities, sent a clear message to Aramark and Sodexo by returning strong strike votes during the past two weeks.

Workers in the three major Aramark and Sodexo certifications in VCHA and FHA voted between 95 and 98 per cent in favour of job action, should it become necessary. Workers in four certifications in long-term care facilities voted between 78 and 96 per cent in favour.

“Our goal is to achieve a negotiated settlement that not only provides the working conditions for quality services, but also provides living wages that allow workers to support their families with dignity and respect,” says HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy.

Currently, most hospital workers employed by Sodexo and Aramark earn \$13.05 an hour, with only six sick days per year, and no pension plan. Many also have no benefits because they are either ineligible or unable to afford the 50 per cent premium cost-sharing.

In March, both contractors presented what they called “settlement offers” that rejected the union’s proposals related to living wages, sick days, workload, training and staffing levels – issues that are essential for clean and safe hospitals.

The union is hopeful that a strong strike mandate from workers will bring both contractors back to the table, and will encourage government to take responsibility for the crisis in contracted-out health care services.

“These are profitable global corporations who receive hundreds of millions in public dollars,” said Darcy. “In tough economic times, government must ensure these public dollars support healthy communities and strong local economies.”

Essential services levels are currently being negotiated through the Labour Relations Board and no decision has been made about possible strike action.

A survey of contractor-employed housekeepers and dietary workers in five hospitals found that 30 to 40 per cent hold more than one job to make ends meet, while others face the stress of choosing between food and heat, or being unable to afford basics for their kids like school field trips.

Some of the proposals the contractors rejected include: improved training requirements, regional health and safety coordination to reduce injuries, new floater positions to ensure manageable workloads, and the regularization of casuals to encourage recruitment and retention.

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