



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
AUGUST 25, 2009**

Throne speech signals uncertainty for health care

The Hospital Employees' Union says today's throne speech offers little comfort to B.C. families and communities who need to know that quality and accessible health care will be available even in tough economic times.

The government's promise to protect health care has already been badly compromised by its direction to health authorities to make more than \$300 million in spending cuts to critical services, including seniors' care, community health programs, surgeries and diagnostic procedures.

"British Columbians are looking to government to ensure that health care and other vital public services are protected, especially when their own economic security is at risk," says HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy.

"But government's actions so far this summer and the message in today's throne speech provide little reassurance to families and communities."

Darcy says a planned review of health authority spending and operations will fail if its chief objective is to pave the way for further cuts.

"Our health care system is already stretched to capacity. Further cuts to front-line services and staff would be a costly mistake," says Darcy.

"A rushed review to meet budget pressures is doomed to fail patients and cost taxpayers more in the long run. Careful planning and consultation with front-line staff is key to finding better ways to deliver services to the public."

In response to the government's re-announcement of a public-sector wage freeze, HEU says that the province's fiscal situation must be balanced against the reality of ongoing retention and recruitment issues.

For many health professionals represented by HEU, like Licensed Practical Nurses, wages are no longer competitive with those in neighbouring provinces and do not reflect increased training requirements and expanded responsibilities.

"Government has acknowledged that we need to rejuvenate the ranks in health care and other parts of the public sector in the face of an aging workforce," says Darcy.

"Our union is committed to working with government at the bargaining table and in other venues to make sure that British Columbians continue to have access to skilled and experienced health care workers in the future."

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