



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

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Health care: Status quo budget entrenches unfair measures that target seniors, families, and workers

Despite dire warnings by Liberal leadership hopefuls about out-of-control health spending, stats show B.C.'s investment in the health care of its citizens has fallen below the national average, putting future health outcomes at risk

The province's largest health care union says that the B.C. Liberals have missed an opportunity to provide relief to seniors and families from regressive fees and premiums and to improve health care services.

Despite higher than expected revenues that have reduced the current year deficit by nearly \$450 million, the government will continue to implement hikes to Medical Services Plan premiums that represent a \$410 million hit to working families by 2012. B.C. is the only province that still charges a premium.

And despite acknowledgement by Liberal leadership candidates that residential care fee hikes are causing hardship, the budget takes no steps to alleviate this \$54 million burden on seniors and their families.

HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy says the fee hikes come on top of charges for everything from essential medical supplies to recreational outings.

"Under the new fee structure, many seniors are left with just \$275 a month to cover these extra costs," says Darcy. "They're forced to make heartbreaking choices about whether to purchase a proper wheelchair, personal hygiene supplies, eyeglasses, hearing aids or even oxygen supplies.

"We are forcing seniors into poverty to pay for their own care in the last years of their lives," adds Darcy. "And still health care workers are often stretched too thin to meet seniors' most basic needs."

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And while seniors and families are paying more of the financial burden out-of-pocket, the B.C. government has fallen from second to ninth place among Canadian provinces in its support for the health of its citizens since 2001.

“British Columbians today have benefited from above-average investments in their health care in past years,” says Darcy. “By under investing in health care today, we put future health outcomes at risk.”

Darcy says that the government has set out important goals such as increasing levels of primary and community care, enhancing coordination of services and supporting interdisciplinary care teams.

“When this government tables its real budget in the next few months, we’ll see if the government is serious about these goals.”

HEU is the largest health care union in the province representing 43,000 workers in the public and private sectors. HEU members work in every area of health care and community social services including nursing and patient care, diagnostic services, support services, health records and transcription, trades and maintenance, stores and supply, group homes and finance.

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