



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 5, 2007

Widespread opposition to privatization of hospital services in Okanagan – poll

A poll released today shows that there is little support in the Okanagan for the proposed privatization of maintenance and housekeeping services at local hospitals as part of building expansion plans.

In a Viewpoints Research/Hospital Employees' Union survey of 400 residents of Kelowna and Vernon, nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) said they would trust public employees to provide cleaning and maintenance services in local hospitals, but just one out of five (22 per cent) would trust a private corporation to do so.

A request for qualifications issued by the Interior Health Authority and the provincial government for the financing, construction and operation of a hospital expansion project opens the door to the privatization of services at the existing Kelowna General and Vernon Jubilee hospitals.

Such a move would result in the loss of more than 300 jobs in those communities.

The deadline for RFQ responses was Monday. The IHA and Partnerships BC – the government agency charged with promoting the privatization of public infrastructure – will look at those responses before issuing a request for proposals this summer.

An overwhelming majority (80 per cent) said that the IHA should reject Victoria's direction to privatize cleaning and maintenance services if it felt that doing so would put patient care and safety at risk.

A clear majority (62 per cent) opposed the privatization of these services.

Nearly nine out of 10 (87 per cent) concluded that patient safety and quality of care should be the top priorities when making decisions regarding the \$200 million capital project.

But just eight per cent say lower construction costs and more rapid completion are priorities in making a decision about the project, despite these reasons being advanced by promoters of public-private partnership schemes.

“Okanagan residents who use these hospitals are looking to the IHA to make the right decision, even if it runs counter to Victoria's pro-privatization policies,” says HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy. “And this poll indicates that they are not prepared to sacrifice publicly-provided cleaning and maintenance services in their hospitals.”

The Viewpoints Research poll was conducted between May 25 and May 27 and is considered accurate to within five percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

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BACKGROUND

Poll indicates support for public hospital services

The Viewpoints Research/HEU telephone survey of 400 adult residents of the Vernon and Kelowna areas was conducted May 25 to May 27. It's considered accurate to within +/- 5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

The survey included 200 from each Census Metropolitan Area (Kelowna and Vernon), and the results were weighted to reflect the actual distribution of population between the two areas. Here are the detailed results for the questions included in the release:

Who do you trust more to be responsible for cleaning and maintenance services at Kelowna General and Vernon Jubilee hospitals?

A private corporation	22.0 %
Public employees who currently provide these services	62.6
None/more than one	3.0
Don't know/refused	12.4

Regardless of what the provincial government wants them to do, the IHA should reject proposals to privatize existing hospital services if the health authority finds that doing so will put patient care and safety at risk.

Strongly agree	45.6 %
Agree	34.2
Disagree	10.9
Strongly disagree	6.0
Don't know/refused	3.4
Total agree	79.8
Total disagree	16.9

As part of plans to expand Kelowna General and Vernon Jubilee hospitals, the provincial government wants cleaning and maintenance services at these hospitals to be privatized. Do you support or oppose privatizing these services?

Strongly support	12.0 %
Somewhat support	17.2
Somewhat oppose	15.1
Strongly oppose	46.9
Don't know/refused	8.8
Total support	29.2
Total oppose	62.0

Which one of the following do you think should be the top priority when decisions are made regarding the construction and operation of these expanded hospitals?

Patient safety and quality of care	86.7 %
Rapid construction and lowest possible cost	8.4
None/more than one	2.9
Don't know/refused	2.0

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