



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

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Budget update signals that critical health care investments are on the way, says HEU

[VICTORIA] Plans to tackle the opioid crisis, improve access to effective and affordable drug coverage and improve seniors' care are critical and welcome reinvestments in British Columbia's health care, says the 49,000-member Hospital Employees' Union.

"Today's budget update represents a recommitment by government to strengthening public health care, and addressing issues that are linked to poor health outcomes – like housing insecurity, poverty and addictions," says HEU secretary-business manager Jennifer Whiteside.

"By taking action to get help to those living with addictions, implementing a poverty reduction strategy and tackling housing affordability, this government will promote healthier communities and this will result in lower health costs over the long term."

Significantly, the finance minister announced \$265 million in new spending, over three years, to reduce overdose deaths and improve access to mental health and addiction support.

"Our members on the front line of health care know firsthand how badly these investments are needed to save lives and promote healthier communities," says Whiteside.

Whiteside says health workers are struggling to provide good health care in a system that's been mismanaged and starved for resources by the previous government for more than 16 years.

"Under the Liberals' watch, per capita health spending by the B.C. government slipped from second to eighth place among Canadian provinces. Health authorities haven't kept pace with the health care needs of a growing and aging population.

"So we are very much looking forward to working with a government that will reverse this slide and listen to the voices of health care workers who are eager to be partners in improving care."

Whiteside noted that the previous Liberal government was forced to announce an ambitious plan to improve staffing levels in residential care last spring, after it was revealed that nine out of ten care homes failed to meet provincial staffing guidelines.

"Both the NDP and the Greens are committed to addressing the residential care staffing crisis, so we look forward to quick action to ensure seniors receive the dignified care they deserve."

The phasing out of the unfair MSP, action to address the housing crisis, the implementation of a child care program, a strategy to reduce poverty and improve wages – and other measures – will make life more affordable for many HEU members and their families, says Whiteside.

HEU is B.C.'s largest health union with members working in hundreds of occupations in hospitals, care homes, home care agencies, First Nations health centres and other settings.

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