



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

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Pre-election budget fails to reverse 15 years of damage to seniors' care and critical health services, says HEU

There's no fix to a growing crisis in seniors' care or to the ongoing underfunding of B.C.'s health authorities in today's pre-election B.C. budget, says the Hospital Employees' Union representing more than 46,000 health care workers.

"The crisis in seniors' care is 15 years in the making and it's getting worse," says HEU secretary-business manager Jennifer Whiteside. "Vulnerable seniors and the health care workers that provide for their personal care needs are paying the price."

Last month, the seniors' advocate office reported that nine out of ten care homes aren't funded to meet government's own staffing guidelines – up from 80 per cent last year.

"Faced with this growing crisis a year ago, the BC Liberals ordered a review of staffing levels in our care homes. A year later, there's been no action to improve staffing levels and conditions are getting worse for workers and care home residents," says Whiteside.

"That means more worry for vulnerable seniors and their families, and more stress for workers who are stretched to the limit to find time to bathe, feed and toilet residents, much less find time to hold the hand of a resident who is scared or anxious."

And the budget provides little relief for B.C.'s health authorities who are responsible for running hospitals and care homes, and providing community health services. Averaged over the next three years, they'll see an annual average increase of just over two per cent, which won't keep up with inflation and a growing and aging population.

"On the front-lines of health care, we'll be treading water," says Whiteside. "That means emergency room congestion, cancelled surgeries and hallway medicine will continue."

Since 2001, British Columbia has fallen from second to eighth place among Canadian provinces in its per capita investment in the health care of its citizens.

"While the finance minister wears B.C.'s low-ranking in per capita health spending as a badge of honour, what it really represents is a decade and a half of neglect of our hospitals, care homes and community health services," says Whiteside.

"This budget is a lost opportunity to take pressure off hospitals, improve care quality for seniors, and reduce unsustainable injury rates for those who provide their care."

HEU is B.C.'s largest health care union with members working in a wide range of occupations in hospitals, residential care, home care agencies, First Nations health centres and logistics and supply operations.

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