



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HEU welcomes plan for more seniors' care staff, calls for greater accountability from care home operators

B.C.'s largest health union says today's announcement by Health Minister Terry Lake is a "significant steps" towards addressing the growing staffing crisis in residential care.

"Our members are struggling to meet the needs of residents when nine out of ten care homes are not funded to meet the government's own staffing guidelines," says Jennifer Whiteside, secretary-business manager of the 46,000-member Hospital Employees' Union.

"More staff means that proper, unrushed care and greater dignity for seniors is possible. And because care homes are understaffed and residents' health needs are growing, they are among the most dangerous workplaces in the province for injuries. Increased staffing will make the work safer."

Today's announcement includes a four-year plan to add 1,500 new positions in residential care including 900 care aides, 465 nurses and 150 other positions including rehab assistants and activity aides.

Whiteside welcomed government's commitment to put more effort into monitoring staffing levels, but called for stronger measures to hold care home operators to account for the funds they receive, including limits on profits and contracting out.

"Mechanisms are needed to ensure funding goes to care, and not diverted to profits or administration," says Whiteside. "We need action to end repeated contracting out – a practice that displaces entire care teams and disrupts the continuity of care for seniors."

The union also welcomed measures to train more care staff, but says that government and care home operators must also acknowledge that decent wages and job security are critical to providing stable working and caring conditions – and reducing staff turnover.

"The crisis in seniors' care has been 15 years in the making, and won't be solved overnight," says Whiteside. "But the plan announced today is an important validation of the concerns raised by family members, care staff, health unions and advocates."

Today's announcement follows a year-long review of staffing levels by Abbotsford South MLA Dr. Darryl Plecas, which was also released.

"I want to acknowledge Dr. Plecas for his important work on this issue, and particularly for the time he took to familiarize himself with our members' perspectives," says Whiteside.

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HEU includes 20,000 members who work directly in seniors' care including 15,000 care aides and community health workers who provide the bulk of personal care to seniors. HEU also represents activity aides, rehab assistants, nurses and support workers in care home settings.

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BACKGROUND WITH TIMELINE INCLUDED WITH WEB VERSION AT WWW.HEU.ORG

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