



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 4, 2018

Province acts to protect patients from extra billing

The provincial government's plan to protect patients from extra-billing by practitioners and private clinics is fundamental to restoring quality health care and equitable access to services for all British Columbians, says the 49,000-member Hospital Employees' Union.

B.C.'s health minister Adrian Dix announced measures today to ensure patients who are charged for publicly-insured health care services are reimbursed – and hold extra-billing doctors and clinics accountable for violations of federal and provincial medicare laws.

The province will enact enforcement measures contained in 15-year-old legislation passed by the B.C. Liberal government in 2003. However those measures were quickly abandoned under pressure from private clinic operators who benefited from extra-billing for health services insured under the *Medical Services Plan*.

The federal government withheld \$15.9 million from B.C. in health transfer payments in the 2017-2018 fiscal year because of previous extra-billing that is prohibited under the *Canada Health Act*.

HEU secretary-business manager Jennifer Whiteside says the previous government's failure to act pressured thousands of B.C. patients to pay privately for procedures that are fully-covered by the *Medical Services Plan*.

"Laws designed to protect patients from extra-billing were allowed to gather dust while private clinics thumbed their noses and federal fines for *Canada Health Act* violations escalated," says Whiteside.

The provisions of the 2003 *Medicare Protection Amendment Act* will empower the Medical Services Commission to refund beneficiaries in cases of extra billing. And it will require practitioners engaging in extra billing to refund the fees, be subject to fines starting at \$10,000 and face the possibility of being de-enrolled from the *Medical Services Plan* altogether.

"Enacting this legislation demonstrates our government's commitment to restoring quality health care and increasing access to necessary health services for all British Columbians," says Whiteside.

HEU, founded in 1944, has been a vocal advocate for universal public health care since its early days. The union represents members working in hundreds of occupations in hospitals, care homes, home care agencies, First Nations health centres and other settings.

-30-

Contact: Sara Rozell, HEU communications officer 604-209-3861 (cell),
604-456-7161 (direct)