



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

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Health authority slashes community lab services

The Vancouver Island Health Authority is cutting hours at south Island community labs, and ending home visits to collect blood and other lab specimens from the frail elderly and the disabled, in most circumstances.

The cost-cutting measures come as B.C.'s health authorities grapple with the province's decision to slash planned spending on front-line health services, says the Hospital Employees' Union.

The union's secretary-business manager, Bonnie Pearson, says the cutbacks are just the beginning of a long summer and fall of program and service cuts that will negatively impact the accessibility and quality of health care services.

"The B.C. Liberal government says it's protecting health care, but that's clearly not what's happening on the ground," says Pearson.

"These cuts will undermine access to outpatient lab services on the south Island, and deprive the health authority of an important revenue source to support other health services."

Effective August 8, VIHA will shutter its Admiral's Walk, Brentwood Satellite, and Keating X Road labs on weekday afternoons. In addition, the Admiral's Walk and Keating X Road locations will no longer open on Saturday mornings.

Outpatients will be forced to use other options such as the Royal Jubilee Hospital lab, where they will also have to pay for parking, or to visit a private lab.

As of September 1, VIHA will no longer provide home collection services to the elderly and disabled in virtually every circumstance.

Currently, community lab workers visit up to 25 homes each weekday.

The HEU learned of the cuts last week, along with a plan to reduce hours for lab workers by the equivalent of about three full-time positions.

In the provincial budget tabled last month, the B.C. Liberals announced that they would cut back on planned spending to health authorities by more than \$120 million over the next two years.

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They also announced plans to reduce global costs for outpatient laboratory testing. Currently, health authorities and private lab companies charge the Medical Services Plan for outpatient lab tests under a fee-for-service model.

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