



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

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Investments key to sustained health sector response to COVID-19, says HEU

B.C.'s largest health care union is welcoming today's announcement of a significant investment in front-line health care workers as part of \$1.6 billion in provincial government funding to sustain B.C.'s health care system going forward.

"These government investments in health care are critical to our ability to respond to the pandemic and care for patients and vulnerable seniors," says Jennifer Whiteside, HEU secretary-business manager.

"Front-line health care workers are under a great deal of pressure, and recruiting more staff is key to helping relieve some of the stress they are facing, especially in long term care.

"Staffing shortages were an issue in long-term care before the pandemic. Necessary restrictions limiting staff to working at one site have in many cases made this situation even more dire.

"So we look forward to digging into the details of the government's plans for recruitment and retention for thousands of new care aides and other front-line staff."

The \$1.6 billion announcement includes more than \$165 million to level up wages in the long-term care and assisted living sector where significant wage gaps between sites forced many workers to hold multiple jobs and undermined recruitment and retention efforts.

"It's time to make those changes permanent and return to standard wages and working conditions across the funded seniors' care sectors as had been the case before 2002 – a level playing field for seniors and workers and a more sustainable long-term care sector moving forward," says Whiteside.

Whiteside noted that at many B.C. hospitals, housekeeping and dietary staff earn less today than during the SARS epidemic 17 years ago – a result of privatization and contracting out.

"That's an injustice to valued front-line health care workers that should not survive COVID-19. It's time to bring this work back under the control of our public health authorities."

HEU is B.C.'s largest health union with more than 50,000 members working in hospitals, care homes, community agencies, First Nations health centres and other settings.

