



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 19, 2019

Health care renewal on course with Budget 2019, says 50,000-member Hospital Employees' Union

[VICTORIA] The government's reinvestment in better care for seniors, faster access to surgeries and building and renovating hospitals continues to be a priority in the 2019 provincial budget, says the Hospital Employees' Union (HEU).

In the budget tabled today, health care programs will see a lift of \$1.3 billion over three years, which will include support for a multi-year plan to boost staffing levels in nursing homes to the minimum guidelines established by the BC Liberals, but unmet by the former government.

The budget backstops an ambitious plan by the health minister to provide patients with faster access to surgeries and diagnostic procedures through a program of new innovations and strategic investments announced last March.

"The former government left a fragmented and under-resourced health care system that failed to meet the needs of patients and seniors," says HEU secretary-business manager Jennifer Whiteside. "Reversing the damage won't happen overnight, but today's budget signals this government's on-going commitment to restore and strengthen vital health care services."

Budget 2019 continues support for the second year of a \$548 million investment in seniors' care including more staff for long-term care, home support and other services.

The capital plan anticipates a number of hospital renovations announced over the last year that will enhance and improve services in communities across B.C. And significantly, health authorities won't be forced to use inflexible and expensive public-private partnership (P3) schemes favoured by the former BC Liberal government. Those long-term liabilities amount to almost \$1 billion in health care alone.

"Looking forward, the province needs to address our over-reliance on for-profit care homes by expanding the number operated by health-authorities," says Whiteside. "This will ensure that we can maintain stable, high quality working and caring conditions for seniors."

Budget 2019 includes a number of health initiatives that will make life more affordable for British Columbians including eliminating Medical Services Plan premiums on January 1, 2020, and reducing or eliminating Pharmacare deductibles for 240,000 families.

"Making life more affordable, improving access to housing and childcare, addressing the deficit in mental health services and dealing with the opioid crisis will all contribute to better health outcomes and less pressure on our health care system," says Whiteside.

"Poverty is also a determining factor in people's health. So this government's poverty reduction strategy going forward will need to include improvements to income and disability assistance rates over and above those announced in this budget."

HEU is B.C.'s largest health union with 50,000 members working in hundreds of occupations in hospitals, care homes, home care agencies, First Nations health centres and other settings.

-30-

Contact: Sara Rozell, Communications Officer, 604-209-3861