



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

MEDIA ADVISORY

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More than 800 community living workers in Victoria join province-wide strike actions on Thursday, January 31

Workers will picket centrally on Blanshard Street between Tolmie and Cloverdale – 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Community Living workers who support people with developmental disabilities at ten agencies in Victoria will be on strike Thursday, January 31.

The striking workers – members of the Hospital Employees' Union – are employed by: Becon Support Services, Community Living Victoria, Crossroads Human Services, Independent Living and Housing Society, Integra Support Services, Kardel Consulting, Kjosa Community Living, Vancouver Island Autistic Homes, Victoria Community Resources Society, and Western Human Resources.

“It's time for government to step up to the plate and improve funding for community living and other community-based social services,” says HEU secretary-business manager Bonnie Pearson.

“And that includes a fair wage increase for the people who support some of our most vulnerable citizens.”

Community social services workers are among the lowest-paid workers in the public sector. Starting wages are \$15.54, which is a dollar less than it was ten years ago.

“Those low wages mean many workers can no longer make ends meet and are forced to take on second jobs, or leave the sector altogether,” says Pearson. “It has also created serious recruitment and retention problems for community social services employers.”

Some employers are now voluntarily paying above collective agreement rates to recruit and maintain qualified staff.

Frontline staff at Community Living BC (CLBC) staff agree that additional funding is urgently needed to address the chronic program and support shortages in community living. More than half of all respondents to a recent survey conducted by the BCGEU – which represents CLBC workers – expressed concerns about the budget-driven funding decisions

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they had been forced to make over the previous year with respect to their clients. And more than 40 per cent said they had been required to cut services or supports they considered necessary for their clients' health, safety or well-being.

Workers will begin joint picket action on Blanshard Street between Tolmie and Cloverdale at 8:00 a.m. Thursday morning.

The Victoria strike is part of larger job action taking place at several locations across B.C. Tomorrow, workers represented by CUPE will also be striking in Trail, Castlegar, Salmon Arm and Creston; workers represented by BCGEU will be striking in Kamloops, and workers represented by the United Food and Commercial Workers will be striking in Kamloops and Vanderhoof.

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