



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

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No room in budget for critical health needs

Today's provincial budget cements B.C.'s trailing position among Canadian provinces in its support for health care, says the Hospital Employees' Union.

As a result, B.C.'s health authorities and front-line health care workers will be hard-pressed to meet ongoing demands for health services, let alone make critically needed improvements in areas like seniors' care and mental health services.

Over the next three years, health authorities will receive funding increases averaging barely more than two per cent annually.

And since 2001, B.C. has fallen from second to ninth place among Canadian provinces in per capita support for health care. Only Quebec spends less.

HEU secretary-business manager Bonnie Pearson says: "Today's provincial budget means putting off critical investments that will generate better health outcomes and cost savings in the future."

In particular, Pearson notes that the government has been unable to meet its own targets for staffing levels in residential care facilities, and has ignored key recommendations made by B.C.'s ombudsperson to improve seniors' care.

"As it stands, there is a workload crisis in long-term care that has produced some of the most dangerous working conditions in the province in terms of injuries."

The union also notes that B.C. continues to experience higher than average hospital readmission rates – including higher rates of readmission for mental illness – than the Canadian average.

"Clearly, we need to invest in residential care and community health services now to take pressure off our hospitals over the long term," says Pearson.

"But this budget is a recipe for more hallway medicine."

While failing to deliver on critical priorities, the provincial government is shifting more of the costs of health care directly onto B.C. families.

The government's take from Medical Service Plan premiums will increase by 17 per cent over the course of the three-year fiscal plan, and now generates nearly as much revenue as corporate taxes.

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