



## Growing seniors care crisis forces government review

After a week of sustained pressure to act on the growing crisis in seniors care, B.C. Health Minister Terry Lake has ordered a review of staffing guidelines in the province's residential care homes.

HEU's secretary-business manager Jennifer Whiteside is welcoming the review, and says the union will continue to call on government to legislate staffing levels that would ensure seniors get the quality and continuity of care they need.

At the same time, B.C.'s Seniors Advocate Isobel Mackenzie has also called for legislation that would regulate a minimum level of staffing in long term care.

A comprehensive directory for residential care facilities, released by the Office of the Seniors Advocate on March 18, shows the vast majority of the province's government-funded care facilities do not meet the ministry's staffing guideline of 3.36 hours of care per resident per day.

"The Advocate's report validates exactly what our members have been experiencing first-hand, on the ground. Our facilities are seriously understaffed," says Whiteside. "Clearly, the government's recommended staffing guidelines are not being met. But that's only part of the story. We also know it has become common practice for many employers to make the problem even worse by refusing to backfill when workers are off sick or on vacation."

She says that without enough people on shift, staff simply cannot provide the quality and level of care needed to keep themselves and their residents safe.

But that's not the only issue contributing to the growing crisis in seniors' care. Whiteside says the ongoing problem of contracting out and contract flipping continues to go unchecked.

"Just last week, our members at Wexford Creek in Nanaimo were blindsided by an announcement that the owner – Good Samaritan – is selling the facility and contracting out the entire staff," she says. "Again, we are seeing workers, seniors and their families about to be thrown into chaos while government and its health authority ignore the devastating impact for everyone involved."

Whiteside says the union is demanding Island Health stop the sale, stop the contracting out and bring the facility under direct administration.

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