

Make it public.



Reuniting the
health care team



HEU



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A lot of racialized women and recent immigrants to Canada work in these jobs. These workers may feel intimidated to speak out about working conditions. We need to make sure there's fairness for people who don't feel like they can speak out.

Gwenda Alexander, Housekeeper, Burnaby



Make It Public

For nearly 20 years, more than 4,500 hospital housekeeping and dietary staff across British Columbia have worked for multinational corporations.

That's because the BC Liberals introduced Bill 29 in 2002, legislation that paved the way for these essential health care workers to be fired and offered to reapply for their jobs at half the wages.

Thousands of workers, predominantly women and racialized people, now struggle to make ends meet, earning low wages with few benefits and no pensions.

These critical health care workers – who keep our hospitals and extended care homes clean and safe, and prepare and deliver meals to patients – earn less today than they did during the SARS epidemic of 2003.

And they face enormous risk during this pandemic, with COVID-19 infection numbers exceeding all other allied health occupations with the exception of nurses and care aides.

In 2018, the legislature passed Bill 47, *the Health Sector Statutes Repeal Act*, which repealed Bill 29 and set the stage for reuniting our health care team.

We need to move forward with a pandemic recovery that includes stronger public health services and good jobs. Let's make sure that the failed policies of the past do not survive this pandemic.

The time to act is now

- The BC NDP has committed to reuniting our public health care team.
- Contracts with companies are up for renewal, and collective agreements have expired.
- HEU and health employers have established a labour adjustment framework to transition the work back to B.C.'s health authorities.

The impacts of privatization and contracting out on health care

- 👎 Low wages, few benefits and insufficient sick days have created a recruitment and retention crisis putting workers at risk.
- 👎 Workers report inadequate training, limited access to supplies, heavy workloads and not enough staff.
- 👎 Working short-handed means more injuries, stress and the inability to get the work done.
- 👎 Wage suppression and the removal of benefits and pensions have created a second class of health care workers in our hospitals.

HEU believes the government should move quickly to meet their commitment to reunite contracted hospital dietary and cleaning staff with the rest of the health care team already employed by health authorities.

- 👍 This move will ensure equitable wages, benefits, job security, and pensions for currently contracted dietary and cleaning staff.
- 👍 Reuniting the health care team will improve retention rates and ensure greater worker and patient safety.

Addressing discrimination in health care:

- Privatization has created a second class of workers in our hospitals. Four out of five are women, and this workforce is highly racialized.
- The BC NDP has made a commitment to consider policy and budget decisions by reviewing all decisions through a GBA+ equity lens.
- Reuniting these workers with the health care team is an act of solidarity with the most marginalized workers in the health care system.



I only sleep for a few hours a night because of my two jobs. My grandkids ask me why I'm always working. I tell them it's how we keep food on the table and stay in our house.

Myrna Rebolledo, Housekeeper, UBC Hospital

**Compass
housekeeper:**
\$17.00 per hour
Eight sick days
No pension

**Health authority
housekeeper:**
\$20.97 per hour
18 sick days
Pension



Low wages and no pension

Compass pays housekeeping aides \$17 per hour and provides only eight sick days per year. Other multinationals like Sodexo, Aramark and Acciona pay comparable wages for housekeepers and dietary staff.

While employees can register for a Compass Group Canada Group RRSP Plan, there are no employer contributions.

Privatization and contracting out have deprived thousands of HEU members, predominantly women – a group that is statistically more likely than men to live out their senior years in poverty – of a pension plan.

And as members work precariously and without a reliable schedule, they don't always receive enough shifts, making it even harder to make ends meet.

Multinational companies reap the profit

Even though these private global corporations make considerable profits, they continue to shortchange workers. For example, the 2020 operating profits for Compass Group was \$519 million in Canadian dollars.

Caring conditions put workers and patients at risk

Housekeepers and dietary staff ensure rooms, furnishings, and equipment are clean, which is essential to infection control; they dispose of bio-hazardous materials, and they prepare and deliver meals.

HEU members report not receiving adequate supplies, including gloves.

When contracted housekeeping and dietary workers face barriers to providing safe care, patients and workers are put at risk.

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There were not enough staff to clean the hospital to the standards agreed to in the contract and reviews of the cleaning protocols to train staff were not completed, resulting in protocol breaches.

BC CDC report on the 2008 *C. difficile* outbreak at Nanaimo Regional General Hospital.



Contracted housekeepers and dietary workers make less today than they did during the SARS epidemic of 2003

The solution

Bring contracted housekeepers and dietary workers back into the public service. By reuniting the health care team, the government can ensure equitable wages, benefits, job security, and pensions for currently contracted workers, improve retention rates, and provide greater member and patient safety. The BC NDP government repealed Bill 29 three years ago with the promise of justice for these workers. With a renewed election commitment to reunite the health care team, and labour adjustment measures in place, the time to act is now.

About HEU

Established in 1944 at Vancouver General Hospital, the Hospital Employees' Union is B.C.'s largest health care union, with more than 50,000 health care and community social services workers across the province in hospitals, care homes, community agencies, and First Nations health centres.

HEU represents more than 4,000 contracted hospital support workers currently employed by a number of multinational corporations under contract to Vancouver Coastal Health, Vancouver Island Health, Fraser Health and the Provincial Health Services authorities.

“ In 2004, I went from earning \$18.10 to \$10.15 an hour. I lost all my benefits. No sick time, no vacation, nothing at all. I'm 65 and still working because I couldn't save while making such a low wage, and I have no pension to rely on.

Catalina Samson, Food Service, Sodexo VGH

