

BULLETIN

In 2021, let's build a foundation that we can all stand on: HSA President Val Avery

December 22, 2020

A message from the President

It's hard to believe that 2020 is soon coming to close. It's no secret that it's been a challenging year. I am so proud of our members' commitment to delivering quality public healthcare and social services in the midst of a pandemic that has taken a heavy physical and emotional toll on the communities we serve.

With the October provincial election now over, HSA is focusing on the important work before us in advance of the provincial budget, which will be presented by the government in February. We are continuing to lobby on the issues that matter most to our members, paying close attention to the important window of opportunity we have now to implement a recovery strategy that repairs longstanding cracks in our health and social systems.

As many economists have highlighted, there has never been a more fiscally opportune time for the province to borrow funds to make historic investments in BC's health and social infrastructure. The Bank of Canada has maintained a record-low overnight rate - also known as the policy interest rate - of .25 per cent, creating favourable borrowing conditions that are unprecedented.

HSA is calling on the province to increase investments in health care and social services in its upcoming budget, including capital investments that will expand publicly managed and non-profit seniors' care.

We're calling on the province to provide a significant funding boost for early intervention therapies in order to tackle the long waitlists that prevent children with disabilities from accessing the rehabilitative services they need, when they need them. This funding is desperately needed to increase staffing in BC's Child Development Centers - a message we're taking to government.

Health science professionals are driving the delivery of public health care, and we are calling on the province to build on its recent efforts to address ongoing staff shortages in the health sciences. Over the past three years we've seen the government increase training spaces for priority professions facing critical shortages, but it can't stop here. We're asking the government to fund additional post-secondary training spaces, introduce new clinical leadership opportunities, and fund wage increases that are competitive with other provinces and the private sector.

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, the occupational health and safety of our members has been a serious and ongoing concern for HSA. HSA has advocated for increased protections for frontline workers and comprehensive, province-wide OH&S policies. In November, our tenacity reaped results, with the Ministry of Health issuing an updated policy mandating the wearing of masks in all health, long-term care, and assisted living facilities.

And HSA is continuing to push the government on granting presumptive coverage to all health care and social service workers, which would make it easier for our members to advance a workers' compensation claim after experiencing traumatic events at work.

Just next door in Alberta, workers in public health care are facing a wave of attacks from Premier Jason Kenney and the United Conservative Party government. Bill 30 seeks to expand the privatization of healthcare through dramatically increasing the contracting out of publicly-funded surgeries. And in the middle of a public health crisis, the government announced a plan to cut 11,000 jobs at Alberta Health Services. Members of the Alberta Union of Public Employees (AUPE) are fighting back, and HSA stands in solidarity with workers defending their jobs and the public health care system.

Their struggle reminds us how precious public health care is, and to seize the opportunity we have before us in BC to build a solid foundation of quality and accessible care that leaves no one behind.

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