

BULLETIN

IHA cuts services to seniors, children

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Citing budget cuts, the Interior Health Authority has eliminated crucial services for vulnerable residents in the Kootenays.

Golden Hospitals speech language pathologist will leave at the end of September, leaving neurological patients, speech-delayed children and stroke and surgery patients without the critical support they need.

Meanwhile, the recreation therapist at Talarico Place in Castlegar has been laid off and recreation therapy services at Boundary Hospital in Grand Forks have been halved.

Reid Johnson, president of the Health Sciences Association, the union that represents the laid off workers, said the cuts will hurt vulnerable patients in the region.

-Health Minister Kevin Falcon has directed health authorities to balance their budgets, and the direct result is reduced services to British Columbians," he said.

-Communities in the Kootenays have already suffered too many losses to their health care services. These latest cuts will end up costing the system more in the long run," he said.

-Speech language pathology is critical in the rehabilitation of stroke patients, for example," he said. "And with early intervention and therapy for children with speech delays, they can help solve many problems.

The reduction in recreation therapy services will also have an acute impact on seniors in the region, Johnson said.

-Recreation therapy has been proven to decrease the need for medication in agitated or depressed seniors. In addition to enriching the lives of seniors in care homes, recreation therapy lowers depression rates, and keeps seniors active and engaged ... helping to stave off dementia and other chronic health conditions," he said.

At Talarico Place, where half of the seniors are of Doukhobor descent, the recreation therapist spent years developing activity plans geared specifically to their unique needs.

"Without those therapy services, the well-being of residents will suffer," Johnson said.

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