

Community health services & support: new collective agreement

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ore than 13,000 community health workers represented by HSA and eight other unions in the Community Bargaining Association (CBA) have voted 78 per cent to accept a new collective agreement. Employers have also ratified the 2-year contract which, in exchange for modest concessions, discourages massive contracting out under Bill 29 and creates enhanced employment opportunities for displaced employees.

The agreement is the result of intensive bargaining following the parties first meeting on January 22nd, where the Health Employers Association of BC (HEABC) tabled an extensive list of concession demands. These included a 17 per cent wage rollback, severe cuts to health and welfare benefits plus 50/50 cost-sharing of premiums, reductions in sick leave benefits, termination of all modified work week arrangements, and elimination of all superior wages and benefits.

Employment security, identified as the number one bargaining priority by the HSA members covered by this collective agreement, was the unions principal bargaining demand. The new agreement creates disincentives to contract out large amounts of work, and creates several new opportunities for displaced employees to remain employed with their current employer, or with a different employer in the sector.

In exchange, workers have agreed to a 4.06 per cent wage rollback, elimination of a previous agreement to provide comparability with the Health Services and Support ... Facilities Subsector, delay in the implementation of a pension plan and a slight reduction in future vacation accrual.

-These negotiations were intense and difficult," said Lori Horvat, Senior Labour Relations Officer and HSAs representative at the Community Bargaining Association.

-It was evident from the start that the Liberal government placed little or no value on the experience and dedication of health care workers who care for children with special needs and people with mental and physical disabilities, or who provide support services for alcohol and drug counseling, or home support for the elderly," she said.

-Our members made it abundantly clear that employment security was their number one priority in this round of bargaining. We were able to reject the employers outrageous demands for a 17 per cent wage roll-back and other extreme concessions, but the provisions of Bill 29 made it necessary to give up some things in order to limit the number of HSA members who will be laid off as health authorities re-tender contracts, and to obtain improved employment opportunities for those who are displaced."

-In supporting this agreement, HSA members have shown they recognize the difficulties we faced during negotiations, and accept that the best possible outcome was achieved, given the circumstances."

The new contract for the community health services and support subsector will be in effect from April 1, 2004 to March 31, 2006.

Printed copies of the collective agreement will be available from employers at a future date. In the meantime, members can obtain detailed information on the new provisions of the agreement by visiting the [collective agreements page on this web site](#). Information posted on the web site includes the full text of the memoranda of agreement containing the major changes to the contract. [Click here for up-to-date information about community health bargaining](#). 

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180 East Columbia
New Westminster, BC V3L 0G7

Website
www.hsabc.org

Telephone 604-517-0994
1-800-663-2017