

# 2 FEBRUARY 06

## #3

### Unions outline alternatives to counter concessions

**W**ith community health talks back on this week, efforts to achieve a new contract finally appear to be getting into gear.

Benefits continue to be a major issue for employers, who are represented in the negotiations by the Health Employers Association of B.C.

On February 1, HEABC provided a lengthy presentation to justify concession demands to reduce benefits coverage. Meanwhile, the union bargaining association countered with a number of concrete solutions to address the issue. One example the unions highlighted is an early intervention pilot project for workers on sick leave and long-term disability in the community social services sector.

The pilot project has already produced some sizeable savings that run into the millions of dollars for employers in this sector and is a very positive example of how we can work cooperatively to improve health outcomes for workers and achieve cost savings. Community health employers seem interested in exploring this opportunity further.

In addition, the unions proposed other benefit improvements based on the prevention principle that could reduce costs even further, for example expanding access to chiropractic services in the extended health plan as a way to reduce prescription claims as an alternative to skyrocketing drug costs.

For Thursday February 2, talks are expected to focus on reclassification for audiometric technicians, schedulers, LPNs and LPN supervisors.

With 8,000 members working on the front lines, BCGEU is the biggest union in community health. Other Union Bargaining Association member unions include: United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1518, Hospital Employees' Union, Health Sciences Association, Canadian Union of Public Employees, and the Professional Employees' Association. Other smaller unions involved in the sector are represented in the talks by the Canadian Auto Workers union.

HSA is represented at the bargaining table by Senior Labour Relations Officer Lori Horvat and Charles Wheat, a residential care worker from Dawson Creek.

