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Releases

Health care voices call for permanent paid sick leave program in BC

(Unceded Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh and Musqueam territories — Vancouver, BC) - Prominent voices in BC's health sector are calling on the BC government to deliver a permanent paid sick leave program with coverage of at least ten days of worker wages. The appeal to government comes as new data from the Workers' Compensation Board shows rising numbers of workplace exposures, and as BC's health care system strains under high rates of hospitalizations due to COVID-19.

"Health science and community social service professionals know firsthand that we are all safer when sick workers stay home. Paid sick leave is not only good for public health, it is vital for health care workers working tirelessly through this pandemic to keep our health care system running" said Val Avery, President of Health Sciences Association, the union that represents thousands of specialized members of the health care team, including respiratory therapists, lab, and x-ray technologists. "As the third wave of COVID-19 continues, paid sick leave will help reduce workplace exposures, easing pressure on our health care system and saving lives. BC has an opportunity to build a public health legacy by providing permanent paid sick days for every worker."

The BC Federation of Labour (BCFED) has long advocated for a permanent sick leave program and has laid out key principles that a made-in-BC program must adhere to:

1. **Paid**:?when a worker wakes up feeling sick, they can stay home and receive their full wage or hourly rate
2. **Seamless**:?available immediately to all workers through their employers
3. **Universal**: covers all workers regardless of workplace or immigration status, whether full time, part-time, or temporary
4. **Permanent**:?protects workers, workplaces, and communities during this pandemic and beyond
5. **Ample**:?provides at least 10 paid days of leave for illness or required isolation during the pandemic

“The pandemic has highlighted the dire need for paid sick leave. It does not make sense from a public health perspective for employers to expect workers to work when unwell” said family physician, Dr. Birinder Narang. “We know patients are not getting tested, are working while sick and exposing their families due to the lack of paid leave. We must stand for workers and protect them going forward.”

The BCFED plan looks past the pandemic and includes guaranteeing three days of paid sick leave under the *Employment Standards Act*, with an employer paid program that enables workers to accrue up to ten days of leave through the year. Everyday without ample paid sick leave is a day where workers--predominantly lower-wage, racialized workers—are at risk.

“Sick health care workers should never have to contemplate putting vulnerable patients and residents at risk because they can’t afford to miss a day’s work,” said Barb Nederpel, HEU President and BC Health Coalition Co-chair. “But casual, part time and privatized health care workers have little to no sick time and a single sniffle can wipe out what little they have.”

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