



**Positive. Public. BC's Voice for Medicare**

# BC Health Coalition 2009 Annual Report

2009 was a busy year for the Health Coalition as we continued to be active on various health care fronts in the province. It has also been a year of considerable growth and change as our three-year Friends of Medicare Campaign wound down, leaving our organization with expanded capacity and a record year for mobilization and action for stronger health care.

In July our Steering Committee engaged in an extensive strategic planning process that has now given us a four-year plan with clear goals in the areas of priority campaigns, outreach and network building, internal communications and fundraising.

## A culture of fundraising

An important new direction for the BCHC is our commitment to fundraising and using a wider array of engagement strategies to enlist individual support for the work we do. We have set an ongoing goal of a labour/community funding ratio of 80/20 per cent and have begun to build fundraising initiatives into all of our campaigns. This diversification will help increase the Coalition's self-sufficiency in the years to come.

## Focus on Seniors and People with Disabilities

2009 saw the provincial government continuing to ignore the concerns of seniors and fail to act to improve necessary services. Its promise to build 5,000 new not-for-profit long-term residential care beds and remains broken, but its drive towards private for-profit care continues despite evidence that not-for-profit facilities offer better patient-to-staff ratios and quality of care.

The BCHC kicked off 2009 by sending 5000 letters to Victoria to demand that the government follow through on its promises and listen to the concerns of seniors that were reflected in our Seniors' Care Campaign.

The campaign was developed in consultation with BCHC members, seniors and seniors' advocates from around the province who gathered in May 2008 to discuss the current crisis in seniors' health care and organize to demand action from all levels of government. Participants expressed collective concerns that despite countless reports, studies and recommendations, the provincial government continues to allow seniors to suffer.

The campaign continues to develop and our Home and Community Care working group has put together updated demands to reflect the needs of BC's Seniors and People with Disabilities.

A key demand has been to call on the provincial government to immediately implement all 10 recommendations regarding rights

for seniors in residential care made by provincial Ombudsperson Kim Carter in her recent report on seniors' care. The report is the first part of an ongoing systemic investigation in response to a growing number of complaints and increasing concern about seniors' care in B.C.

## New election rules: Bad for democracy. Bad for public health care

Last year, the BC Government passed sweeping amendments to the Provincial Election Act. These changes effectively muzzle any individual or organization who may, "take a position on an issue with which a registered political party or candidate is associated" prior to an election date.

Although the BC Health Coalition is strongly non-partisan - Public Health Care is certainly an election issue. As a result, the BCHC along with numerous other organizations and individuals were required to register as third-party advertisers with Elections BC in order to get the message of "Vote Public Health Care" out to members, supporters and the general public between Feb 13, 2009 and Election Day, May 12, 2009.

We took the opportunity to help galvanize mass opposition to the election "gag law" with a viral video that was viewed by thousands. Parts of the gag law have since been struck down by the BC Supreme Court.

Despite the restrictions, the May provincial election provided us with the opportunity to raise public awareness of health care issues through a door-to-door canvass in three BC communities.

## Medicare: It's got us covered

Last year saw the BC Health Coalition take the fight for public health care all the way to B.C.'s Supreme Court.

Last January a consortium of private for-profit clinic operators launched a legal challenge to the laws that protect public health insurance and British Columbians' equal access to health care.

Our "Medicare: It's got us covered" campaign is now working to mobilize public pressure to ensure that the provincial government mounts a vigorous defense of the universal public health insurance that we all rely on.

The BC Health Coalition, Canadian Doctors for Medicare and others have applied to participate in the legal case and have won intervener status in the case. This is an important victory, but the work has just begun.

The lawsuit casts the government in the role of defending public health insurance in the courts, even as these same private clinics

have benefited from lax provincial health care policy. That's why the BC Health Coalition, Canadian Doctors for Medicare and others are at the table to ensure the public's interest is well represented in this unprecedented legal challenge.

We are calling on Minister Falcon must take a leadership role in protecting British Columbians from private investors and insurance companies who are charging illegal user fees and billing patients for health services already covered by Medicare.

This legal attack on public health insurance is part of the private medical industry's attempt to allow American-style health insurance in to Canada.

## Working at the Municipal Level

The BCHC's Private Clinics working group took the opportunity to call on key municipal councillors who signed the BCHC Public Health Care Defender pledge during the last municipal election. With their help we successfully gained the support of the cities of Victoria and New Westminster who brought forward a resolution to the UBCM Annual Meeting that calls on the province to stop the expansion of for-profit surgical and MRI/CT clinics.

Municipal governments can play an important role in protecting public health services in their communities. Support for this resolution is just one of the ways that municipal officials can take a stand to protect and improve our public health care system and promote the development of a public, not-for-profit health care facilities.

The pro-public healthcare resolution will be on the agenda again at this year's UBCM Annual Meeting. If it passes it will send an important signal to the provincial government and the private, for-profit clinic owners who are setting up shop in B.C.

## Mobilizing for National Medicare Week

One of the highlights of 2009 was National Medicare Week that saw public health care activists from across Vancouver Island converge on the lawn of the Legislature in Victoria on November 18 to demand that the BC Government stop breaking its promises to protect public health care. The islanders were galvanized by the wave of cuts to programs and services, delays in funding to develop necessary care facilities, growing privatization, and increased rates for seniors' facilities.

The rally was one of many events organized across the country from November 16-20. Representatives from communities throughout the Vancouver Island Health Authority made their voices heard.

## Engaging Youth

The BC Health Coalition continues its partnership with the youth-driven non-profit society Check Your Head

For the past three years the great folks at Check Your Head have been presenting workshops on our Public Health care system to youth (ages 15-20) all over BC.

There are many questions about what's best for Canada's health

care system, yet there is little youth-accessible information and opportunities for youth-based dialogue on this issue. The workshop provides a space for much-needed youth-to-youth education on systems of health care.

Through facilitated discussions and interactive activities, youth participants explore the values behind universal care, encounter the realities of for-profit health care, and discuss the history of our healthcare system

## New challenges

The BC Health Coalition is calling on Health Minister Kevin Falcon to listen to British Columbians' desire for a strong public health care system.

It is now more important than ever that the provincial government listen to British Columbian's clear desire for positive public solutions to strengthen public health care. It's time they took proactive steps to enforce their own rules and protect patients from out-of pocket expenses and two-tier, private insurance that undermines public health care for all of us.

Since taking over the health care portfolio last spring Falcon has consistently asserted that the system he has been entrusted to administer is "unsustainable". Public health care advocates have good cause to be concerned.

One of his first moves was to direct health authorities to cut \$360 million from their 2009 budgets, resulting in longer waits for diagnostic services and cuts to elective surgeries.

This year he has proposed opening up BC to "medical tourism" in order to turn our health care system into a so-called "revenue generator" and has announced a new funding regime—dubbed "patient focused funding"—that he claims will increase hospital efficiency by forcing them to compete for patients.

Coincidentally, all of these moves serve to benefit the province's growing for-profit medical clinic industry—the very industry that the Minister has a responsibility to defend our public health care system from in the courts.

Now, he has appointed Kip Woodward, an investor in one of the key players in this legal attack on public health care, as chair of Vancouver Coastal Health – the province's second largest health authority.

The BCHC will be at the front lines of this and other public health care developments in the months to come—and will be backing our demands with evidence.

Experience shows that we will make our public health care system stronger when we invest and expand on proven public solutions and in doing so we can continue to have one of the best health care systems in the world.



Alice Edge  
Co-chair



Rachel Tutte  
Co-chair