

Provincial Budget Ignores Realities of COVID

Regina – Despite what we hear in the media about the provincial government’s spending plan for this fiscal year, it’s all too obvious that the priorities in this budget do not coincide with any of the social programs or ministries hardest hit by COVID-19.

“We have noted that the lowest budgetary increases were to K-12 education, followed by the health sector at 5-6%. On the flip side, there is an over 500% increase to the Ministry of Trade and Export. This is telling when we look at our provincial priorities over the last year,” says Barbara Cape, President of SEIU-West.

“Specifically, this budget provides no comfort to our members who work in Community-Based Organizations (CBO),” adds Cape. “For the last 13 years, our members who work in the CBO sector have campaigned vigorously for multi-year funding. This government has ignored the ongoing hardships that they face due to a lack of stability.”

SEIU-West CBO members provide valuable client-facing front line care and services in group homes, crisis response, addiction recovery facilities and day care centres and regularly face the challenge of provincial funding running out.

“On the failed promise of hiring 300 Continuing Care Assistants (CCAs), a mere 5% increase to the CCA positions in long-term care was insufficient at best; now in this budget reveals they will not keep their commitment – rather we see a ‘down payment’ of only 100, potentially, during this fiscal year,” continues Cape. “This is unconscionable as the need is so very pronounced; a fact made so abundantly clear during our prior year of long-term care tragedies during a global pandemic.

“The additional strain on our health care system due to the onslaught of sickness and death during COVID has not been addressed in this budget. We are not certain how our members in the health sector can place any trust in our government. We question how the \$56 million allocated to the Temporary Wage Supplement in 2020-21 was spent as there is no transparency here. We know that it was not offered equitably to all front line essential workers in health care.”

The Saskatchewan Temporary Wage Supplement has not been offered to health care providers who work in hospitals and only included those who work in home care during the second round of payments.

“Finally, our members in education support continue to suffer from the previous funding cuts in this sector; an increase of 2.3% does not even measure inflation. COVID has presented a need for added student supports; this funding demonstrates that our provincial government are unwilling to fund these supports. It’s a reckless dismissal of education quality concerns voiced by students, parents and those who work in the sector and will haunt our province for years to come.”

Service Employees International Union West (SEIU-West) represents over 13,000 people across Saskatchewan. They include people who work in health care, education, municipalities, community-based organizations, retirement homes and other sectors. They are joined by one colour – purple – and one union – SEIU-West. Visit PurpleWorks.ca to find out more about SEIU-West members.

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