



Vancouver Women's Health Collective

HER VOICE

Fall 2003

Are you interested in...

Doing research on complementary therapies, reproductive issues, or endometriosis? Knowing about the health resources available to you in your community? Finding a new doctor or therapist? Inviting the VWHC to your meeting to do a women's health workshop?

Then please call our health information line: 604-736-5262, visit our Health Information Centre at 1 - 175 East 15th Avenue in Vancouver, or check out our web site: www.womenshealthcollective.ca

Staffed predominantly by volunteers, the information centre is open:
Monday through Thursday
10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
Monday and Tuesday
2:00 to 5:00 p.m.
Wednesday
6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

WOMEN ARE FIGHTING BACK!

On April 1, 2004, we at the Vancouver Women's Health Collective will lose 100% of our provincial funding. While we are currently working very hard to ensure that our centre continues to operate beyond April 1st, and for many years thereafter, our future is uncertain.

Thirty six other women's centers in BC will also see their provincial funding cut – presently centres receive \$47,000 per year – forcing many to close. On the same day, as many as 29,000 people will lose their welfare benefits, as the province's new two-year time limit also comes into effect April 1st.

The forecast for next spring is grim. The poorest in our province will face increasingly harsh living conditions that put them at a greater risk of violence. The majority will be women already disproportionately affected by government cuts to social services, including health care. By closing women's centres, the BC government will further deprive women of essential services.

Along with many other organizations across the province, we are fighting the provincial government's anti-woman and anti-poor policies, speaking out against health and social services cuts, in publications, to the media, at conferences and demonstrations, and as a part of the coalitions to which we belong.

The VWHC is an active member of the BC Health Coalition, which has been fighting the cuts to health care in the province on all fronts. We have worked extremely hard to always link the cuts to their impact on women, because cuts to health care affect women in particular and intensified ways as patients and health care workers.

On April 1, 2004, we at the Vancouver Women's Health Collective will lose 100% of our provincial funding.

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The VWHC's Menopause Kit

**Menopause:
a self-help approach**

**Now available for \$10
(plus \$2.50 if postage is
required).**

**Please call 604-736-5262
to order a kit.**

from page 1... **Fighting Back..**

We also participate in the BC CEDAW group, which in January 2003 presented information at the United Nations about Canada's performance under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The UN Committee on the Convention responded in its report to the Canadian government by singling out BC for condemnation, and urging the provincial government to revise policies that harm women and girls. To date, the BC government continues to rebuff the BC CEDAW group's attempts to hold it accountable. VWHC's Caryn Duncan will travel to Ottawa in the second week of November as the

representative of BC CEDAW to the Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA) to organize on this issue nationally.



**Terrie Hendrickson, Caryn Duncan and friends
march against the Campbell cuts.**

Coalitions have formed around many issues, from homelessness and challenges to welfare to privatization of government services. The BC Coalition of Women's Centres has been organizing since the provincial election in anticipation of changes to government services and programs. When women's centres learned that they were losing their provincial funding, the BCCWC's campaign against the BC Liberals escalated.

The Coalition of People with Disabilities and the BC Persons with AIDS Society fought back against a provincial disability review designed to disqualify thousands of recipients. In the end, the vast majority of those reviewed were deemed entitled to receive disability benefits.

Coalitions have succeeded in halting the privatization of BC liquor stores, and stopping the government from turning the Coquihalla highway into a P-3 (public-private partnership). Coalitions are now organizing to prevent the privatization of BC Hydro and ICBC. As well, in October 2003, community groups initiated a constitutional challenge to the Canadian government to fight the BC government's plans to cut people off welfare.

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AS WOMEN WE ARE PRO-CHOICE BECAUSE...

Even though abortion was made legal here in 1969, anti-abortion doctors, politicians and organizations continue to stand in our way by spreading misinformation and protesting outside of our clinics.



This past summer, the Vancouver Women's Health Collective held a reproductive rights workshop. From this, sprung a pro-choice action group that organized publicly in the community in response to the anti-choice movement. It was called the "Clothesline Project." This initiative provided women with the opportunity to connect and share their reasons for being pro-choice. Women were welcomed to paint their feelings and experiences on pieces of cloth that were then strung together on a clothesline. Due to the incredibly positive response that was received at the site of the event at Commercial and Broadway and at Under the Volcano this summer, the VWHC is proud to announce our decision to carry forward with this project.

If you are interested in getting involved, please e-mail Iona at ielgabry@shaw.ca

Are you looking for a welcoming, comfortable, women-centred meeting space to offer a workshop, hold training sessions, etc...

The VWHC has space available for \$12.50/hr plus GST .

Please call 604-736-4234 for more information.



BCHC FIGHTS FOR WOMEN

The BC Health Coalition has been around in one form or another for over 10 years, but has really

services. With the Vancouver Women's Health Collective, we put out a fact sheet listing the impacts of the current cuts on women. You can find a copy of the fact sheet on our website at

www.bchealthcoalition.ca. As well, for the first time in Canada, the Women's Working Group celebrated the International Day of Action for Women's Health on May 28th. We are now beginning to plan our May 2004 event!



Caryn Duncan speaks out against cuts to health care at the BCHC's May 28th International Day of Action for Women's Health.

turned up the heat the last couple of years under a government that seems to want to privatize all public services, especially health care. Expanding the private sector in our health care system will be disastrous to a sustainable and universally accessible system. It will especially affect women, who tend to have the highest health care needs and are one of the most marginalized groups in society. This is why women and health is a key priority for the BCHC.

The BCHC Women's Working Group ensures that all health care cuts and reforms are seen through a women's perspective (gender lens) and that the health coalition doesn't lose sight of the fact that it is women being affected by the cut backs in jobs and

The BC Health Coalition is a network of 31 organizations, which believes that everyone has the right to high quality, responsive and appropriate health care that is publicly funded, publicly accountable and publicly controlled. Access to health care must be equitable and all issues which determine an individual's ability to achieve and maintain good health (food, education, income, housing, social support and personal safety) must be addressed by all levels of government. The BCHC includes: seniors, women, anti-poverty activists, people who are HIV positive or living with AIDS, workers at community centres, nurses, concerned citizens and health care workers.

If you're interested in finding out more about the BC Health Coalition, please check out our web site www.bchealthcoalition.ca, or call at 604-681-7945. You can also leave a message at the hotline number (1-877-600-1180) and let us know how the health care cuts are affecting you. It's going to be an exciting and crucial year in the health care fight back – we hope to see you there!

Terrie Hendrickson is the BCHC's Coordinator.



Premier Campbell wants to sell off the services that make Medicare work

Privatizing critical health care services like the Medical Services Plan and PharmaCare is a bad decision. It's risky. It's potentially costly. The only sure benefit will go to large corporations.

Yet the Campbell government continues to push to privatize this important and sensitive work.

It won't work

The final bidders include three American multi-national corporations whose record does not inspire confidence. And there's one Canadian company with no experience in health care.

The American corporations have a track record of unexpected costs, failures to deliver service, and improper billing.

It failed in the US

The State of Connecticut comptroller says letting one of these companies handle Medicaid claims was *"the worst fiscal*

and policy decision of the decade for the state of Connecticut."

A grand jury was convened in Texas to investigate concerns that the state was being overcharged.

In Wisconsin and Arizona it's a similar story – unauthorized expenses and higher costs than the public services.

A threat to privacy

Private companies are already answering your phone calls about MSP and PharmaCare issues. This has created delays for callers in getting the information they need, and long backlogs of calls.

Now the government wants to make it even worse. Premier Campbell wants to put private corporations in charge of all the personal information in the MSP and PharmaCare computers.

This ill-considered plan, driven by ideology rather than facts, makes privatizing the Coquihalla look sensible.

Gordon Campbell's privatization plan is a threat to your privacy, and to B.C.'s health care system.

Don't sell off the Medical Services Plan or PharmaCare

Sign the petition at: www.petitiononline.com/publicpc



THE VANCOUVER WOMEN'S HEALTH COLLECTIVE

The members adopted the following policy, developed through the summer strategic planning process, at the September 2003 VWHC Annual General Meeting:

Our Universal Purpose

Health for all women in an equitable society.

Our Mission Statement

We are women who value women's knowledge, support one another to take charge of our own health, and raise awareness and inspire action for the feminist advancement of women's health.

Our Values

Women's knowledge

- We value shared information and experience over authoritative knowledge, especially when it comes to our own bodies. We support a woman's right to make informed choices about her health and health care. We support women's sexual autonomy. We are pro-choice.

Our health model

- We promote a holistic model and preventative health care. We fight for publicly funded, universal health care. We challenge the health care system to meet the needs of women.

Our anti-violence agenda

- We expose and work to change the ways that the health care system perpetuates violence against women. We offer information and other resources to women who are experiencing violence in their lives.

Our alliances

- We embrace a local and global perspective on women's health and health care. We forge alliances with women, women's organizations, and health groups to build an equitable society.

Our political culture

- We offer women a woman-only space and women-centred services and a gendered perspective on health and health care. We are feminists who work collectively, value consensus decision-making and support women activists strategizing for change.

Our Members

We are a charitable, non-profit women's organization, funded primarily by donations, membership fees, grants, and fund-raising initiatives. Volunteer members are an essential part of the VWHC. There are many opportunities for volunteers to share their stories and enhance their skills. Please call us for more information. Many thanks to past and present volunteers and members, without you we would not be here!

HER VOICE

HER VOICE, the VWHC newsletter is published twice a year. HER VOICE is a forum to connect VWHC members, as well as the broader community, around women's health issues and activities at the VWHC. Submissions relevant to women's health and/or well-being are always welcome. Opinions expressed are those of the writer and not necessarily those of the VWHC.

Corporate Media Ignores our Concerns

This letter was submitted to the *Vancouver Sun* on November 12, but never printed.

Over the last couple of weeks the *Vancouver Sun* has dedicated a few inches to the debate around women's breasts. Much has been written about the health risks related to silicone gel versus saline implants and yesterday you reported that women may soon be able to grow "natural, new breasts" with their own fat cells.

Regrettably, the debate has skirted an important issue. Why do thousands of women pay thousands of dollars each year to have larger breasts? As was reported by both proponents and opponents of breast implants, 80% of surgeries are for non-medical reasons.

Shouldn't we be asking ourselves why all these women feel compelled to have bigger breasts? Clearly, this is about two things: making money and selling hope. If 80% of the surgery is "cosmetic", then 80% of the "market" is a paying market. Thousands of women each year pay doctors to have this surgery.

Why do doctors who perform breast augmentation speak in terms of improving women's self-esteem and confidence? What are we doing to girls and women in our society that their bra size is a measure of their confidence? Is it naive to think that women of all shapes and all sizes should feel good about themselves? I don't think so.

I'd like to see a real debate about our society's perceptions of women. About doctors making money off women. It goes without saying that women should be encouraged to see themselves as attractive and smart for who they are as they are.

*Caryn Duncan
Vancouver Women's Health Collective*

from page 2... **Fighting Back...**

For many in BC, 2004 does not look bright. However, the fight back against the BC Liberals continues. Please join the VWHC and other women's and social justice organizations as we fight for the rights of women and the poor, and for accountability from our government.

Brenda Belak recently joined the VWHC as Information Centre Coordinator. For many years Brenda fought for women's human rights in Burma.



Please join the
International
Women's Day
Organizing Committee to
help plan IWD 2004.

For more information call
604-708-0447.

Meetings start at 7 p.m.
at the VWHC and are
scheduled for:

December 11

January 5, 15, 26

February 5, 16, 26

March 1



Yes, I want to help women access quality health information!

I would like to join the VWHC I would like to renew my VWHC membership

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____
(street)

_____ (city/province) _____ (postal code)

VWHC membership category: Fee enclosed: \$ _____

- Volunteer - pay what you can up to \$25/yr
- Associate \$10-\$25/yr
- Health Practitioner/Therapist/Business \$50/yr

All VWHC Members

- receive the VWHC's newsletter and invitations to special events
- may participate at the monthly Steering Committee meeting & the AGM
- support the mission statement, values, and goals of the VWHC

Volunteer Members

- expected to volunteer at the information centre & attend one bingo shift

Health Practitioner/Therapist/Business Member

- entitled to a business card ad in HER VOICE

I wish to make a donation to the VWHC (*a charitable tax receipt will be issued*) \$ _____

Full amount of my membership fee and donation \$ _____

Thank you for your support!



Contact Us

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Vancouver, BC V5T 2P6

health information line: 604-736-5262

fax: 604-876-1282

administration line: 604-736-4234

www.womenshealthcollective.ca

e-mail: vwhc@vcn.bc.ca

2003/2004 VWHC Funders

BC Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and
Women's Services

BC Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor
General, Gaming Policy

VWHC Members & Donors

Summer Career Placememt Program, HRDC

POD Grant, funded by the United Way of the
Lower Mainland, the Vancouver
Foundation and the City of Vancouver

