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OPINION

Investing in coastal communities

Multiplier effect: VCH spending goes to vendors whose employees, in turn, spend in the areaKIP
WOODWARD

B.C. Day is about celebrating our province, our history, and in no small way, our future. It is a day that also celebrates building communities, highlighting the thriving businesses, talented professionals, and hard-working entrepreneurs and employees that generate income, investment, and revenues that make our province strong, our future bright.

Vancouver Coastal Health knows that building communities is achieved through the shared and critical contribution of B.C.'s private and public sectors to make our health-care services and programs accessible — making them caring and sustainable places in which to live.

VCH will spend \$3.4 billion this year for the health and care services and programs that are delivered to over one million people in British Columbia. That's a tremendous investment to provide the health care these communities count on. So it's worth taking a moment on this day to look more closely at this investment.

The critical work is delivered by 2,100 physicians, 14,300 full- and part-time staff and 3,000 volunteers, all among the most dedicated and skilled in Canada. So, no surprise, payroll is the major component of VCH spending — about 70 per cent, this year — and that these funds are further distributed throughout the greater Lower Mainland by staff and employees through their personal spending. Large sums are also paid directly to all levels of governments and their myriad agencies, plus residential care facilities and home and community care providers.

What is surprising, and interesting, is how much our staff is supported by local businesses in delivering the health care we count on. These businesses — located in every Metro Vancouver community — help make our health services possible and available through their supply



Construction of VGH's Joseph & Rosalie Segal Family Health Centre is one project designed to build a healthy and sustainable future in B.C.

of goods and services. They provide the high-quality goods and services that VCH counts on to deliver on its mandate, and are significant, and worthy of recognition on this or any day.

How significant? In 2014, within our service area in Vancouver, Richmond, North Shore, Sunshine Coast, Whistler, Squamish, and Bella Bella and Bella Coola, VCH purchased close to \$120 million of goods and services from over 1,100 local businesses. Moreover, in the communities adjacent to our service area, VCH purchased an additional \$190 million of goods and services from over 700 additional Metro Vancouver businesses.

So in total, VCH purchased nearly \$310 million worth of goods and services from more than 1,800 businesses in the Metro Vancouver region. When owners and employees of those

businesses receive their pay cheques, and buy the goods and services they and their families need, the money continues its economic multiplication effect.

From prosthetics to paper clips, the breadth of what VCH acquires locally is remarkable. There are the specialized purchases of custom surgical instruments and micro-optics and micro-dental technology, plus all the specialized servicing needs our modern health-care system requires, from calibration services and laser repair to custom gasket and ball bearings replacements.

However, it is everyday goods and services — the things any large operation needs to operate safely, securely, and in a sustainable way — that form the majority of VCH purchases. These include boiler cleaning, construction, geotechnical services, metal fabrication, roofing

repairs, window and door repair and replacement, signs, elevator maintenance, diesel repair and maintenance, electrical repair, concrete finishing, painting, logistics, flooring, heating, ventilation, refrigeration and air conditioning services and maintenance, food and beverage services, fire safety, pest control, freight, multiple layers of recycling services, and the list goes on.

Many of our goods and service suppliers are in such major commercial and industrial centres as Vancouver, Richmond, Burnaby and Surrey. But the VCH reach for the goods and services that makes our operations and services accessible and efficient extends to many smaller players — hardware stores and stationers and graphic artists — across the region.

Take, for instance, the Sunshine Coast. VCH purchased

goods and services in 2014 from about 170 businesses between Gibsons and Powell River, spending \$2.5 million to support VCH facilities on the Sunshine Coast such as Sechelt Hospital, Powell River General Hospital, five seniors' facilities, three primary care health units, and mental-health and addiction services. This spending represents direct and critical links to our communities' health and sustainability, and offers an example of the shared role British Columbia's private and public sectors play in making our health care services and programs accessible in our communities.

Building a healthy and sustainable future for the people who call these communities home are good things to celebrate on B.C. Day.

Kip Woodward is chair of Vancouver Coastal Health