



COVID-19 Conference Call

April 15, 2020

The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) is a family of 11 Component and 3 affiliate unions. Taken together, we are one of the largest unions in Canada. Most of our 390,000 members work to deliver public services of every kind to the citizens of their home provinces. We also have a large and growing number of members who work for private businesses.

Larry Brown, President

Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer

COVID-19 Conference Call – NUPGE Components and CHPS Members
April 15, 2020
12:00 p.m. EST

Participants

BCGEU/NUPGE	Joanna Lord
HSABC/NUPGE	Val Avery
HSAA/NUPGE	Mike Parker
SGEU/NUPGE	Tracey Sauer
HSAS	Karen Wasylenko
MGEU/NUPGE	Michelle Gawronsky
MAHCP	Bob Moroz
OPSEU/NUPGE	Smokey Thomas Filomena Lofranco
NSGEU/NUPGE	Sandra Mullin Lynette Johnson
PEI UPSE/NUPGE	Karen Jackson
NBU/NUPGE	Leigh Sprague
AAHP	Virginia Whitten
NUPGE	Larry Brown, President Bert Blundon, Secretary Treasurer Len Bush, Managing Director Anil Naidoo, National Representative Jeryn Daly, National Representative Nadia Ibrahim, Research Officer

1. Welcome and Introductions

Participants from 9 Components and 3 allied unions joined the call, as well as, Larry Brown, NUPGE President, Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer, and 4 NUPGE staff.

2. Opening Statement – Larry Brown, NUPGE President

Larry Brown welcomed participants to the call and provided opening remarks. He spoke about this morning's Public Services International (PSI) call and the discussion about the need to take stock after the crisis and hold governments to account about what's happened (e.g., issues with PPE, tax avoidance).

Political context: neoliberal governments are abandoning their preoccupation with "balanced budgets" and are rebuilding health care systems that have been slashed over the years. The concern is what direction they will take once this crisis is over.

Brown commented on the situation internationally and in Canada. There are some positive signs in several provinces suggesting the physical distancing measures are having an impact and public support for continued precautions.

The evidence is clear that the pandemic is worsening inequality. It is also confirming concerns about privatization in health care: private long-term care homes are faring worse than public ones. NUPGE will be calling for inclusion of long-term care under the *Canada Health Act*. Concerns remain about impacts on group homes—both staff and residents.

The Quebec government gave itself the power to override education collective agreements. Yesterday, they said people in the education system will be redeployed to health care, although it's still unclear how that will work.

Concerning developments out of Manitoba yesterday (see below):

- CLC is holding a health care unions meeting (Thursday)
- Upcoming NUPGE meetings: Corrections (bi-weekly Tuesdays)
- OH&S officers (Thursday)
- Long-term Care workers (Thursday)
- EMS workers (Friday) and,
- Collective Bargaining Advisory Committee (Monday)
- Working on a meeting for street-level social service workers, possibly for group homes and home care

Len Bush, Managing Director, directed participants' attention to the meeting [webpage](#) and documents compiled there.

3. Updates from Components

MGEU/NUPGE

- Corrections: government is going ahead on closing Dauphin jail on May 29. Concern that the Minister was giving the union incorrect information
- Cases do not seem to be growing, but health care professionals are questioning that. There is a discrepancy with government messaging (talking about more stringent rules about leaving home).
- New MOU on redeploying health care workers: home care workers will be moving into facilities.
- Over the weekend, government gave the order that it will be dismantling the current home care program. There is no shortage of staff to provide the services that are needed, but the province has cut services—only food prep at this time. They seem to be pushing self-managed care and family care
- PPE: as of today, nothing has been provided to members in home care, flood preparation, and highway patrol.
- Premier hired a private call centre to help small businesses access information on federal supports. A private lab company is calling patients who have tested negative. (These could've been opportunities for redeployment.)
- Unions met with the provincial government yesterday. The province is looking at reduced work weeks for the civil service and those who provide non-essential services. Two options: (1) expand employees' ability to participate in the voluntary reduced work week, or (2) work-sharing for non-essential staff to reduce work week to as little as 2 days per week and would get EI for lost work days. For those earning under \$54,000 per year, they would keep 70% of their pay. For those earning more, they would keep a smaller percentage of their pay. This arrangement is only possible if the federal government approves that the employer is eligible to receive this support, which no provinces have been approved for yet. Unions have been asked to help lobby the federal government. Government couldn't define who is deemed non-essential. MGEU has asked if redeployment will be an option (e.g., private call centre, private lab). Government was clear that if the union doesn't agree to one of these options, they could pass legislation and make it so.
- Trying to get in touch with members to take direction from them, but the consensus is that this government is using a pandemic to privatize and cut the civil service
- Sought a legal opinion on postponing Convention and will share with NUPGE

MAHCP

- MAHCP had been pushing for paid leave for workers who are self-isolating and got news yesterday that the province will provide paid administrative leave to frontline health care workers in certain circumstances.

But it's become clear that the government is trying to drive a wedge between essential and non-essential workers (division between public sector workers).

OPSEU/NUPGE

- Directive issued to long-term care: workers can only work at a single site. OPSEU, CUPE, Unifor, SEIU working together on seeking clarity on whether people will lose pay if they typically work in multiple locations. Assurance from provincial government that they will be addressing that.
- Hospitals are at 40-60% capacity. Emergency rooms are not busy.
- Issues around group homes and home care—trying to get orders issued so people can be provided with PPE.
- PPE: supply situation is not great, but not as dire as it was. Alberta has sent PPE.
- LCBO was going to layoff head office staff. OPSEU pushed them to walk this back. Approx. 70 members will be redeployed to retail and approx. 80 non-union staff to regional outlets, but they won't be doing bargaining unit work, instead cleaning, etc.
- Letters sent to Dr. Tam and Dr. Williams about mixed messaging
- Pension plans: OMERS pension (municipal employees' pension plan) trying to move to conditional indexing and will be giving a report today on preliminary effects on the pension plan. Similar calls with OPSEU pension trust, college pension plan, and hospitals plan (HOOP). Some employers are offering one-time buyouts to older workers. It is worth keeping an eye on pension plans.

HSAA

- Tempering criticism right now, but government has been giving information that can be used against them after this is over.
- Dr. Hinshaw has been clear about the value of the public sector.
- PPE: it's because of Alberta's supply chain that PPE supply has been strong. Supply should continue to be okay as long as current usage levels remain.
- Where do we go from here? If the federal government is going to be intervening on wages for essential workers, this may be an opening for broader conversation.
- Closures: Events in the province through to the end of summer are being cancelled.
- Municipalities are saying they aren't eligible for wage support from federal government.
- Loblaws is moving forward on a plan to give health care workers access to curbside pick-up specific time.

NSGEU/NUPGE

- Testing has ramped up, though some issues about where testing happens
- Home care workers had been out in the community with no masks. Small agencies didn't have equipment.
- Some success in getting more PPE in long-term care, group homes, and home care. They are to wear procedural and surgical masks when working with patients/participants (only use face shield or N95 after risk assessment) but are only being issued one for the day. A second one will only be issued if the first is soiled. This is especially a concern for those who are going to multiple homes.
- Group homes: if a resident becomes sick with COVID-19, Department of Health and Community Services will take over the home for a 2-week period. Unclear how this will play out.
- NSGEU trying to get more direction to home support and long-term care.
- Directive to reduce services in home support. Impressions are that this is to redeploy to long-term care.
- Initially government seemed to be positive. NSGEU had weekly calls with department of health and wellness, but was uninvited from these calls last week. Premier has said this is not the time to consider health care workers.
- Government released pandemic projections until the end of June

BCGEU/NUPGE

- Good news: BCGEU affiliate, BC Ferry and Marine Workers Union, were facing a high number of layoffs last week. Most will likely be rescinded. BC Ferries is waiting for clarification on federal wage subsidy.
- Public sector workers have been redeployed to help at Vancouver Airport and larger hotels in Vancouver (processing officers, supervisors to review self-isolation forms).
- Continuing advocacy for workers in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside
- Provincial government will be expanding existing mental health programs to launch some new services virtually.
- Wildfire workers are beginning to be recalled. Some wildfires have already started over the weekend.
- James Coccola is on a social services roundtable group that is having a call today.

HSABC/NUPGE

- 1 more residential care facility has had positive cases, bringing the total to 21 care facilities with active cases.
- Other hot spot is prison in Mission area: 41 inmates, 7 staff who have tested positive. Mobile medical unit in BC is moving there to assist staff.
- Some mental health services are for general population, from kids to immigrant and refugee population. They've also started up supports for health care workers. HSABC was approached by BC College of Psychologists who wanted to offer services to health care workers. 200 psychologists are making their services available free of charge online to health care workers to offer support. This is a positive sign of getting on top of mental health now.

AAHP

- Draft PPE agreement awaiting government approval
- Child care directives have been updated with the possibility of health care workers, who were denied, to be able to access child care.

HSAS

- There will be daily screening at the beginning and end of shifts for all health care workers across the system (initially focused on long-term care) effective this morning. Self-screening questions for those working remotely. Looking at implementing temperature checks, but not yet in place
- Continuous masking: procedural masks for all health care workers (patient-facing providers or walking through a care area)
- PPE agreement: deputy minister of health passed the buck to safety partnership advisory committee. The committee is fairly new and has heavy representation from employers, so unclear what will happen
- Issues with shaming and shunning
- Premier optimistic about numbers, but suggesting next week the government will release a plan about reopening the economy. Chief medical health officer has said we need to be careful about second wave.
- Working on an agreement about redeployment

SGEU/NUPGE

- Government plans for COVID-designated hospitals, but government failed to inform the communities. (e.g., what about those facilities with long-term care, when emergency services would be closed?), so that's created fear
- Working on LOUs with HSAS, SEIU West, CUPE
- Government talking lots about cohorting. Questions about protections for workers who work in multiple sites so they don't lose jobs or hours.
- Some collective agreements do outline how you are paid if you get COVID-19 or are sent home to self-isolate: if you're told to go home, you will be paid outside of your sick leave while awaiting results. Those who test positive will be paid outside of their sick leave. If negative, paid through sick leave. Return to work: provincial medical health officer has extended it to 72 hours symptom-free (from 48 hours)
- Public services workers are being redeployed into health care. Cooperation amongst health care unions

NBU/NUPGE

- Concern about what's happening in Manitoba and whether that's being considered
- Premier was asked by reporters how the province would react to federal government's announcement about topping up wages for long-term care workers. Premier said he wasn't interested. This is frustrating, but the hope is that opposition leaders can push the minority government to change this position.

4. Other Issues and Next Steps

NUPGE will continue to convene these calls weekly.



NATIONAL UNION OF PUBLIC AND GENERAL EMPLOYEES

- B. C. Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU)
- Health Sciences Association of British Columbia (HSABC)
- Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA)
- Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union (SGEU)
- Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union (MGEU)
- Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU)
- Canadian Union of Brewery and General Workers (CUBGW)
- New Brunswick Union of Public and Private Employees (NBU)
- Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU)
- PEI Union of Public Sector Employees (PEI UPSE)
- Newfoundland & Labrador Association of Public and Private Employees (NAPE)

The National Union of Public and General Employees is an affiliate of the Canadian Labour Congress and a member of Public Services International.

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