



COVID-19 Conference Call

April 29, 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 29, 2020
12:00 p.m. EDT

PARTICIPANTS

BCGEU/NUPGE	James Coccola
HSABC/NUPGE	Val Avery
HSAA/NUPGE	Mike Parker Trudy Thomson
SGEU/NUPGE	Tracey Sauer
HSAS	Karen Wasylenko
MGEU/NUPGE	Michelle Gawronsky Charlotte McWilliams Jean-Guy Bourgeois
MAHCP	Bob Moroz Lee Manning
OPSEU/NUPGE	Smokey Thomas Filomena Lofranco
NBU/NUPGE	Leigh Sprague
NSGEU/NUPGE	Sandra Mullin Lynette Johnson
PEI UPSE/NUPGE	Karen Jackson
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, National Representative

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.

Notes from all prior COVID-19 conference calls and other relevant documents can be found on the meeting [webpage](#).

2. Opening Statement – Larry Brown, NUPGE President

Larry Brown welcomed participants to the call and provided opening remarks. He spoke about the discussion of “reopening” happening across the country.

The Public Services International (PSI) call this morning provided an international perspective on reopening. In some countries, reopening has caused a resurgence of the virus.

He highlighted the importance of thinking about post-COVID-19. Right now, social solidarity is important, but we must also ask the tough questions later. We must insist on full accountability for governments who have cut taxes and dismantled public services over decades, leaving us vulnerable.

We must make sure that we do not fall back into old patterns (i.e. austerity). We need to think about articulating the way forward based on a new type of economy.

Issues posed by trade agreements after the pandemic will be something to watch.

3. Updates from Components

HSABC/NUPGE

- New cases are in outbreak settings—long-term care, poultry processing plants, and a federal correctional facility
- Doesn't seem BC will be moving towards opening until new cases are in single digits. Education minister will be watching what's happening elsewhere in the world before reopening schools
- Public health message has been for patience, but more people are going out
- [HSABC bulletin](#) released Saturday announced a \$5 million fund for health care professionals negotiated with Ministry of Health. Eligible workers are those who (1) are not able to social distance in their job or (2) are handling specimens that may be infectious. The fund will top up wages by \$4 per hour for the month of April and will be administered by the unions.

- This was a hard-fought win, but the Ontario announcement stating a broader program, came shortly after, so members' reaction has been lukewarm. Unclear what is the impact of possible federal-provincial arrangements on pandemic hero pay would mean and HSABC is not hearing details, but watching this closely.

BCGEU/NUPGE

- People experiencing homelessness in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and in Victoria: the provincial government announced they will be moving people in encampments into hotels—voluntary at first, mandatory as of May 9 under Public Health Order. The plan is to have them move into long-term shelters
- The province has struck some industry-specific councils to develop reopen plans
- Still challenges with unequal distribution of PPE: health care remains a priority, but people doing health care-like work are not being made a priority

HSA/NUPGE

- Outbreaks in meat-packing plants and among homeless population
- Fort MacMurray is experiencing flooding. The hospital and emergency services station are in the affected area.
- Reopening: conversations around reopening dental offices and other health services. The province says it will be drawing on Saskatchewan's model and is signaling that restrictions will be lifted in the first week of May.
- Comments from members about hero pay after announcements in Ontario and BC. Discussions are happening in Alberta, but the focus was to be on low-paid workers on the front-lines. The labour minister is supposedly looking at options.
- Members that have reallocated flex spending accounts into health spending before retirement, but haven't been able to access services due to lockdown, are at risk of losing that money.

SGEU/NUPGE

- Members are pushing the union about hero pay. Misinformation has been a problem. SGEU notes using this as a long-term bargaining strategy, not a short-term bonus.
- The province is pushing reopening, but little impact on members—still cohorting in long-term care, continuing masking in patient areas. SGEU is still pushing for expanding testing to prioritize health care workers, residents in long-term care

HSAS

- In reopening plan, the province is focusing on keeping the reproductive number under 0.7 (yesterday, at 3.12)
- Discussions in public health circles had been about flu pandemics happening once every 100 years, but now they're saying the actual cycle is 35 years. Need to think about PPE supply, etc. in the long term.
- Concerns with issues related to parents getting their kids vaccinated—risk of spike in measles, etc.
- Principles document on PPE will hopefully be signed today

MAHCP

- Pallister is laying out reopen plans today
- Increasing testing capacity: announced yesterday that Dynacare will be doing up to 2/3 of the testing. MAHCP is pushing back on the private option when the public system is capable with labs across the province. Pallister hinted that the private capacity will continue to be used after the pandemic. MAHCP represents some people in Dynacare, but it seems they won't even be doing the testing, instead work going to a lab in Brampton.
- Issues with hero pay. Considerations: need to emphasize low-paid workers; use language of hero pay, not hazard pay.
- Emergency order for single-site restrictions in long-term care facilities is coming. Waiting for details on which workers it applies to

MGEU/NUPGE

- Pallister said yesterday it will be less than 10% for cuts and layoffs. This is causing more questions: 10% of total civil service or 10% of those who are "non-essential"?
- Agricultural group: layoffs will be among administrative workers. Province signed off with the feds on agricultural initiative, so this is odd
- Long-term care: Limiting workers to one-site for 6 months, but doesn't make sense when these workers can still move around in hospitals, EMS, etc.
- Corrections: Dauphin jail will be closing. Inmate count is lowest it's ever been, resulting in fewer hours for corrections workers
- PPE is still a challenge, especially for home care. Directive is to wear a mask or shield, but staff not given the equipment. Looking at invoking right to refuse
- Privatization in labs, highway maintenance

- Austerity: Even PC supporters are arguing that cuts are the last thing he should be doing. Need to continue talking about protecting public services in the long term.

OPSEU/NUPGE

- Successful yesterday in getting more members on pandemic pay: respiratory therapists, paramedics, public health nurses, and addictions and mental health workers. OPSEU will not be collecting union dues on that pandemic pay bonus.
 - Still some need for clarification, but approx. 400,000 people will be eligible
- A note about mental health implications: in Elliot Lake, a client committed suicide when visiting their probation officer
- Yesterday, Ford announced support for businesses: commercial rent assistance, 24-hour construction for critical infrastructure, 24-hour deliveries to assist grocery stores and pharmacies keep shelves, restaurants and bars allowed to sell liquor with food
- Today, Ministry of LTC, Ministry of Health, and Ontario Hospitals Association held emergency call about Directive #5 on when N95 masks will be used and other PPE. ONA arbitration—judge ruled they need masks. Ministry wants unions to agree on rationing masks in the case of a severe shortage and agree who would go without. OPSEU is pushing back. Government seems to be trying to mitigate liability because class action lawsuits waiting to be certified.
 - Need for greater transparency about supply: government have not been clear on what's happening with Ontario-based production of masks.
 - Pushing for greater transparency and accountability about who is on conference calls after affidavits showed more were listening than had been disclosed. Unions pushing for greater transparency, accountability to know who's on the call. Also pushing for greater transparency about the supply.
- Issues with employers employing different practices across a sector (e.g., hospitals in charge of own contact tracing)

NBU/NUPGE

- Currently in the first stage of reopen plan: two-household bubbles, outdoor activities. Last thing to reopen will be provincial borders
 - Staged approach: if there are 3 unrelated cases in the province over a 6 day period, revert to beginning of reopening plan
- Temporary foreign workers are banned from the province. Source of tension between the Premier and federal government, farmers and producers. Concern about food security impacts

- Hospitals have been quiet and remain that way
- Hero pay issue hasn't come up. Top-up for low-paid workers is still badly needed, and seems like it might be possible
- Mobility agreement extended until the end of May. NBU is supporting this, but want to make sure that eventually people get back to their regular jobs. We don't want the government using this as an excuse to implement a reduced workforce in any department.

NSGEU/NUPGE

- Temporary foreign workers are allowed to come in, but self-isolate for 14 days, with employers responsible
- Northwood long-term care situation:
 - Tension with other unions after reassignment of hospital staff to Northwood long-term care home.
 - Staff now have better access to PPE.
 - Government hasn't reported a number of positive cases from Northwood in their total counts.
- Good Neighbour Protocol in place. Employer claims that Minister of Labour order allows them to move staff anywhere, even if different duties or classification. NSGEU is contesting this, pushing government to take the position that there will be no movement of staff between positive and negative units/facilities, but government won't agree
- Reduction in number of COVID tests
- Issues with child care: government has not reopened child care for essential service workers. Public schools won't be open before May long weekend
- Hearing about hero pay. No uptake from the province, but some private sector employers have given some increases in grocery stores, even in the NSLC (Liquor Control)
- Issues with PPE in home care and group home sector. Government insists everyone has appropriate PPE, but frontline workers say they do not. Individual agencies don't seem to be acting on guidance unless they're told directly
- Positive cases in acute care system
- No talk yet about reopening, but Premier McNeil has said it will be gradual

PEI UPSE/NUPGE

- Province announced 4-phase reopening plan, beginning May 1. Borders won't open except for Islanders and essential services until at least middle of June
- Pressure to reopen, but Premier adamant that safety comes first
- Worry about impact on tourism industry
- Long-term care restrictions staying in place
- Awaiting joint agreement on PPE
- Climate change secretariat was looking at flex work arrangements in civil service and will be doing a survey. UPSE watching for impact on jobs
- Temporary foreign workers are allowed in, have to adhere to 14 day isolation with employers responsible.

AAHP

- First wave has subsided in NL
- Government says planning is underway to determine when and how to relax public health restrictions. The plan is expected tomorrow

4. Other issues and next steps

This conference call will be moved to bi-weekly.

There is much discussion about how we can't go back to normal. We will need to be working really hard to define "the new normal."



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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