



**national  
union**

# **COVID-19 Conference Call**

DRAFT

April 8, 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 8, 2020**  
**12:00 p.m. EST**

**Participants**

<b>BCGEU/NUPGE</b>	Kari Michaels
<b>HSABC/NUPGE</b>	Val Avery
<b>HSAA/NUPGE</b>	Trudy Thomson
<b>SGEU/NUPGE</b>	Bob Bymoan
<b>HSAS</b>	Karen Wasylenko
<b>MGEU/NUPGE</b>	Michelle Gawronsky
<b>MAAHCP</b>	Bob Moroz
<b>OPSEU/NUPGE</b>	Smokey Thomas
<b>NSGEU/NUPGE</b>	Sandra Mullin Lynette
<b>PEI UPSE/NUPGE</b>	Karen Jackson
<b>NBU/NUPGE</b>	Leigh Sprague
<b>NAPE/NUPGE</b>	Arlene Sedlickas
<b>CUBGW/NUPGE</b>	Gaurav Sharma
<b>AAHP</b>	Virginia Whitten Pam Toope
<b>NUPGE</b>	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 14 Components and allies joined the call, as well as Larry Brown, NUPGE President, Bert Blundon, NUPGE Secretary Treasurer and 4 NUPGE staff.

Notes from all prior COVID-19 conference call and supporting documents are available online <https://nupge.ca/content/documents-covid-19-conference-call>.

## 2. Opening Statement – Larry Brown, NUPGE President

Brown gave a recap of activities since the last meeting. He spoke about:

- First modeling numbers came out from Ontario of 3,000–15,000 deaths projected. Quebec and Alberta followed. All provinces using different methods and data points to create their projections.
- Projections highlighted seriousness of situation but also reminded that the situation is not infinite.
- British Columbia has seen great success with social distancing and their rate of increase has slowed quite a bit.
- Internationally, Austria is toying with lifting restrictions and reopening the economy. Peak of the crisis may be passing in Spain and Italy.
- Worldwide, there's considerable evidence that distancing is working to slow the spread of COVID-19.
- In addition to infection models, Alberta gave economic modeling—possible 25% unemployment rate.
- 2 possible futures: future that we need (people realize the problems the austerity agenda has created over the past 25 years) and the future that threatens public services (notion that we need more austerity and can't afford public services).
- NUPGE has released a new paper on income inequality—as bad as COVID-19 is for everyone, it's far worse for low-income earners and vulnerable populations.
- Federal government is still rolling out new programs. Help is slow, but the fact that the government is looking at the need to improve the programs is promising.
- Nursing homes and long-term care crisis are occurring in all provinces. Care providers are forced to work in 3 or 4 homes to make a livable pay cheque which contributes to the spread. BC model of having workers pick one home and paying them a full pay cheque is a model we should be pushing.
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) shortages are ongoing but we're starting to see some relief from the worst of the pressure.

- Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) changes to their infection prevention and control guidance has been marginal at best. Same concerns exist re: not recognizing the danger of aerosol transmission and the need for broader use of N95 masks, other PPE enhancements are also needed and even stronger isolation measures are missing. The guidelines still haven't been released after weeks of review and this is a problem as provinces and hospitals are coming up with ad hoc rules in the absence of federal guidance. Looks like they're going to release long-term care guidelines shortly. This is very necessary as long-term care is a mix of public and private and there is no consistency in the sector in terms of protecting workers and clients.
- Canada Labour Congress (CLC) call occurred yesterday. Some unions are hit harder than others. Restaurant and airline sectors have seen huge layoffs. CLC working with the federal government to improve the CERB eligibility.
- The amount of research done by NUPGE staff has been tremendous. Conference calls ongoing with several sectors. Corrections and liquor control workers calls happen weekly, occupational health and safety happens biweekly. Looking at adding an EMS and long-term care calls to the list. Also looking at calling a meeting for the directors of each union to discuss the workload and logistics.
- Easter long weekend is coming up. Important to rest and unplug if possible.

### 3. Current Situation

#### Ontario

- Advised provincial government to come up with a process to redeploy workers. Resulted in the creation of an online portal to redeploy health care workers. Have also been fast tracking retirees and students close to graduation to get them into the workforce.
- Crisis in long-term care ongoing and reaching new peaks of direness.
- Convention has been cancelled. Looking at ways to move forward.
- Problems with Ontario Nursing Association—PPE verdict handed down that only applied to nurses. Working hard to get the decision to apply to all health care professionals. OPSEU has written a letter to the premier asking him to intervene.
- Region reps report in multiple times a week. Frequent communication happens with the members.
- Decanting hospitals (sending home surgeons who aren't doing procedures). Also trying to empty the jails as much as possible.

## **CUBGW**

- Concerns over PPE shortages for workers.
- Employer originally covered up to 95% top-up to employees in quarantine or self-isolation. CUBGW pushed for full coverage which has now been granted.
- Temperature checks before entering the building starting tomorrow.
- Employer is coming up with face covering recommendation. Won't be N95, but some kind of cloth cover for mouth and a face shield. Workplace is very loud so workers have to be in close proximity to hear each other which increases risk.
- Proposing measures to the employer to have safe sanitation of bottle returns.

## **British Columbia**

- BC housing have opened 900 spaces for people who belong to vulnerable populations to isolate.
- Had a call with the BC Federation of Labour and Mayor of Vancouver to talk about the Downtown Eastside re: health and safety and security concerns. As supplies and money dwindle, there are concerns around people getting more aggressive in relation to drug transactions.
- Beginning to look at economic recovery measures. Trying to ensure voices that work against the best interest of workers are limited in the planning measures.
- Sent a letter to the Minister of Finance to improve conditions for frontline workers in essential services.
- Van City Credit Union has cut credit card interest rates to 0%.
- Government has so far not responded to how they can help other frontline workers beside nurses.
- Government has passed an Order in Council that will let union application cards to live for 6 months as opposed to the regular 90 days.
- Frontline mental health and addictions counsellors are very concerned about the lack of PPE they're being afforded.
- COVID-19 patients are discharged as soon as possible. Usually patients are weaned off ICU and moved to recovery units before being sent home with rehab resources. HSABC concerned about a mental health crisis on the horizon.
- BC Ferry and Marine Workers had 1,400 members laid off unexpectedly this week.

## **Newfoundland**

- 2 new cases reported yesterday (approximately 228 cases total).
- NAPE still pushing hard for PPE to be available for frontline workers.
- General public catching on to social distancing. Cashiers and public starting to wear homemade cloth masks.
- Bank of Canada had to intervene and buy the provincial government bonds. Financial crisis is imminent in the province.

## **Alberta**

- Signed an agreement with other unions and major health employers re: PPE but are facing a huge shortage (more than expected as numbers provided were short).
- Province has formed an economic recovery panel. Giving mixed messages about deficit and pipeline building.
- HSAA to start doing PSAs supporting members for their good work.
- Expect people to struggle with social distancing once weather gets nicer.
- New legislation that any minister can put legislation through with no debate (no sunset clause attached).
- No visitors in hospitals or long-term care facilities (some exceptions made but they must be healthy, must wear a mask, must be escorted, etc.).

## **Prince Edward Island**

- Seasonal recall members will be rehired (approximately 750 members). All winter workers have been kept on to the end of their term.
- Government giving casual workers who test positive for COVID-19 two weeks pay on administrative leave (with possibility to extend on a case-by-case basis).
- Working with other unions on a joint letter to province re: PPE.
- Pre-COVID-19, province was projecting a 2.9 million surplus—now projecting a 3 million dollar deficit.
- Working well with the government.

## **Saskatchewan**

- No word yet as to whether seasonal workers will be recalled.
- Concerns about maintaining member's health plans who are not working because of COVID-19.
- PPE shortages continue to be a concern. Community health members are lacking in equipment and training in how to use it.
- Low rental income housing subsidy was included in budget cutting. SGEU fighting to get that rolled back to keep people in their homes.
- So far COVID-19 hasn't spread to inmate populations, despite several corrections officers testing positive.
- Debating postponing vs cancelling conventions and considering the legal ramifications.
- HSAS crafted a joint statement with other health care unions on workers protection. Deadline for government to respond is today. One of the requests is union representation from each of the health care unions on the personal protective equipment task force. Government still showing a reluctance to include unions in PPE discussions.
- Government maintains that there's no PPE shortage and no cases of rationing. This flies in contrast to member reports of only being given 1 mask per shift, looking at ways to sanitize disposable masks, etc.
- Long-term care worker screening ramping up. Hoping that eventually all health care workers should be screened prior to starting their shift.
- Concerned that there might be a spike in cases due to the Easter long weekend.
- HSAS convention in October. Not looking to cancel yet, but looking at options to get around meeting in person.

## **Nova Scotia**

- Cases rising (32 new today, over 300 total).
- Health authority gave in and allowed more hospital staff to wear masks. Stated there is currently a 1 month supply with no new supplies coming in.
- Long-term care big issue.
- Having nightly town hall calls with members every night (different sector each night).



- Focusing on community spread and mobile testing. You no longer need to have travelled out of province to get tested.
- Chief Medical Officer and Premier unhappy with lack of social distancing. Issued a multitude of fines.
- People who have direct patient contact are now allowed to wear non-surgical masks. Government is ignoring group homes and are leaving employers and workers without direction re: PPE.

## **Manitoba**

- Someone living in a group home had come home from travelling outside of the country. Worker refused unsafe work, result was employer sent resident home to self-isolate with their family for 14 days.
- Looking for information on cancelling or postponing convention.
- Elisabeth Fry Society criticizing MGEU's request that the Dauphin Correctional Centre be kept open as current thought is that jails should be emptied as much as possible.
- Corrections requesting hero pay. Some concern about invasiveness of temperature checks pre-shift. Also concerns that staff taking temperatures aren't trained medical professionals.
- Women's shelters are now deemed essential. Use has declined which is concerning as it means women are staying with their abusers.
- Asking retired workers to come back to work. Haven't limited workers to working in a single site yet but assume it's on the horizon.
- Province wants unions to redo the MOU re: redeployment. All unions working together on this, meeting collectively with the government instead of individually.
- Government working to create emergency COVID-19 hospitals. So far saying this is a precautionary measure.
- PPE continues to be a huge problem. Asking for companies to donate or make PPE which government will buy. Apparently looking at donating PPE to Alberta and Ontario.
- New guidelines on PPE not being released until April 13—the same date new PPE is supposed to be arriving in the province.
- Being very stringent on distributing PPE. Must bring used materials to office and explain how they used them before they're handed new PPE.

- Home care has started screening workers (no temperatures being taken as province has a shortage of thermometers). No social distancing in place at the screening centers. Asking workers to start their shift early for screening (unpaid).
- Stopping visitors arriving from Alberta and Ontario on highways.
- Sandbagging has started in Winnipeg and other areas are on flood watch.
- Manitoba Allied Health continuing to work on paid leave for members who have been exposed to COVID-19. Also working on recall protocols for members who have been sent home but later identified as not coming into contact with an active COVID-19 case.

### **New Brunswick**

- Working on new commercial as a “thank you” to critical workers.
- Labour board has completely shut down. Not entertaining any applications or complaints that might have an impact on the safety of the public.
- Issues around accommodations. Members are getting medical advice that they shouldn't be in the workplace right now due to underlying health conditions. Finding it hard to get members accommodations if working from home isn't an option. Difficult to get access to medical information to inform position.
- Reached a joint statement on PPE with health care unions, regional health authorities, the government, and medical society (doctor's association).



## 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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