



report

**VIDEOCONFERENCE OF
GROUP HOME
REPRESENTATIVES
IN RESPONSE TO
COVID-19**

May 11, 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

Videoconference of Group Home Representatives in Response to COVID-19
May 11, 2020
1:00 p.m. EDT

PARTICIPANTS

BCGEU/NUPGE	James Coccola Andrea Davis
HSABC/NUPGE	Colin Brehart
SGEU/NUPGE	Elizabeth Shoofey-Stabler
MGEU/NUPGE	Michelle Gawronsky Andrew Milejszo
OPSEU/NUPGE	Tracy More
NSGEU/NUPGE	Tracey Best
NAPE/NUPGE	Kelly Roche
NUPGE	Larry Brown, President Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer Len Bush, Managing Director (Office of the President) Nadia Ibrahim, National Representative Sandra Megeney, Administrative Representative

1. Welcome and Introductions

Participants from 7 Components joined the call with Larry Brown, NUPGE President, Bert Blundon, NUPGE Secretary Treasurer, and 3 NUPGE staff.

The Chair, Nadia Ibrahim, welcomed participants to the meeting.

Larry Brown, President, and Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer, provided opening remarks.

Brown commented on how the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the many workers that are on the front lines beyond the health care sector. This includes the workers from the group homes sector, who are supporting some of society's most vulnerable people. This meeting provides an opportunity for Components to share their experiences from the front lines and for the National Union to understand how it can support these members.

Blundon spoke about his experience at NAPE representing workers in the group homes sector.

2. Component Reports

Component representatives provided updates about the impacts of COVID-19 in their workplace or sector. The updates highlighted some common challenges:

- Lack of direction, or inconsistent direction, from government and employers
- Lack of prioritizing of the group home sector—or community social services, more broadly—in the COVID-19 response
- Insufficient access to PPE, but with some variation in experience overall
- Impossible or challenging to maintain physical distancing in a group home setting
- Challenging for staff to explain the restrictions to clients/residents
- Challenging to maintain restrictions or reduce exposure with youth coming and going from group homes
- Impacts of isolation on mental health
- Potential impacts of the provincial “reopening” plans; worker representatives or health and safety committees need to be involved

COVID-19 Preparedness

In Manitoba and Ontario, there is a process for isolating residents in a hotel or designated home in the event of a positive case in a group home. In Nova Scotia and British Columbia, employers do not have a clear or standardized process in place. Only Ontario has cases in homes so far; but as provinces ease restrictions, the absence of clear protocols is a concern.

Success Stories

Representatives also shared some “wins.” Several Components reported they have been able to work collaboratively with their governments or executive directors in responding to COVID-19. Workers and their unions have also had some success in securing the necessary protections or accommodations for employees, such as access to paid leave during self-isolation (e.g., Nova Scotia and British Columbia) and eligibility for wage top-ups (e.g., Ontario).

3. Discussion: A National Strategy

Participants discussed what a coordinated strategy to address issues in the sector might look like, and shared thoughts on how NUPGE can support them.

The main area of discussion was the need for greater visibility of group homes and their workers. Participants noted the lack of awareness and understanding about the jobs that group home workers do. This is a public perception issue, but also a policy issue (e.g., who gets access to PPE).

Participants also commented on the usefulness of coming together to share these updates and experiences. It provides an opportunity to learn from one another and to identify best practices.

4. Next Steps

NUPGE thanks participants for all their dedicated work and for sharing their thoughts and recommendations.

The meeting report will be circulated when complete.



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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