



COVID-19 Conference Call

March 18, 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

Conference Call re: COVID-19
NUPGE Office
15 Auriga Dr., Ottawa, ON
March 20, 2020
12:00 p.m. EST

Participants

BCGEU/NUPGE	Paul Finch
HSABC/NUPGE	Miriam Sobrino
HSAA/NUPGE	Mike Parker Trudy Thomson Ray Geldreich
SGEU/NUPGE	Tracey Sauer Gene Marshall Bob Bymoen Debbie
HSAS/CHPS	Bill Fischer (for Karen)
MGEU/NUPGE	Sheila Gordon Allan Beach Michelle Gawronsky Dianna Schulz
OPSEU/NUPGE	Sara Labelle
NBU/NUPGE	Joyce Aucoin
NSGEU/NUPGE	Sandra Mullin Laura McMillan Robin MacLean
PEI UPSE/NUPGE	Karen Jackson
NAPE/NUPGE	Ashley Carew
AAHP/CHPS	Terry Stacy
CUBGW	Gaurav Sharma

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 11 Components and 2 allied unions joined the call, as well as Larry Brown, NUPGE President, Bert Blundon, Secretary Treasurer, and 4 NUPGE staff.

2. Current situation – Larry Brown, NUPGE President

Larry Brown spoke about the current state of play and updates: including

- State of emergency declared in PEI, Ontario, Alberta, BC. Calgary is the only city so far to declare a state of emergency
- Latest scientific evidence (virus is airborne and lasts on surfaces) will have implications for PPE
- Something to watch: there are calls for releasing non-violent inmates from prisons to reduce threat of spread
- PSI webinar with people from highly-impacted countries happening March 19, 7:30 am EDST - follow up with Anil Naidoo if interested
- Bob (SGEU) raised the impact on mental health and limited resources - NUPGE will add to agenda
 - MGEU to share document on mental health

He also referenced NUPGE materials that were circulated:

- Statement calling for greater consistency across the country (this message came out of the first call with this group)
- Joint Statement: Safety is non-negotiable
- Open letter on medically uninsured (template for Components to come)
- Government responses, which will be updated to include today's federal government announcement
- Institutional and organizations responses

NUPGE is working with HSABC on a paper on the question of personal protective equipment (PPE) working with John Murphy. Murphy's report expected by end of day.

3. Federal response to COVID-19 – PHAC/Labour meeting report back

Anil Naidoo, NUPGE, and Ray Geldreich provided an update on the previous meeting with PHAC.

- Initial call was disappointing. The conversation was derailed by needing to push importance of N95 mask and prevented us from getting to other issues (e.g., therapeutic and clinical guidelines, impacts on people not in health sector).
- New guidelines expected at the next meeting (Friday)
- Because of fragmented system, many problems due to sourcing for N95, ventilators, other PPE - these issues have not been addressed to good effect yet. Some money being freed up to buy resources, but the equipment is in high demand.
- PHAC moving slowly. As of last week, they weren't bringing new people in, but actually understaffed because sent people in to deal with cruise ship scenario.
- The panel who writes guidelines for PHAC includes no experts looking at occupational transmission and front-line workers. Participation of these groups is essential, so we need to challenge their legitimacy on worker controls.
- Concern: unions asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement for next meeting

Next meeting with PHAC scheduled for Friday.

4. Provincial and municipal response: Updates and current frustrations

British Columbia:

- Lagging behind other provinces in response
- BCGEU: Members are showing up for work that should be self-isolated because traveling, or people presenting symptoms and employers (including health authority) saying stay at work, so unions scrambling to stop that practice,
- People in quarantine are not being paid, maybe being laid off (including in health care)
- BCGEU monitoring individual scenarios, but also guiding members on right to refuse unsafe work when employers being negligent
- Concerns around PPE: In scarcity scenario, limited equipment should go to most impact workers, but little confidence in provincial health officer
- Health authority ordering people to work who present symptoms at major health facility
- Pushing government for paid sick leave, moratorium on evictions, etc. but nothing
- It is useful to have a comparison document showing measures adopted by provinces to take to government and health officials - NUPGE will follow up

- Note the problems with smaller or individual employers: employers funded by government, but in sectoral association. Sectoral association saying the right things, but employers not honouring them.
- HSABC: good agreements with public health employers: anyone quarantined paid out of general leave, not sick time; in health and community social services, close to agreement on rate of pay for casual workers; child care for healthcare workers on the government's radar
- HSABC monitoring PPE and question around what's considered essential

Alberta

- Reports coming in from front-lines aren't terrible, impressed with medical officer
- Kenney is in the media taking shots: problems with redeploying and problems with cancelling vacation in CAs not in Alberta. HSAA isn't talking with him right now.
- Government has been fairly receptive to conversations. Lab workers facing high workload but holding the line, turning around tests in 24 hours.
- Calgary state of emergency, provincial state of emergency, nothing yet from Edmonton
- Reduced access to N95 masks. 50 additional ventilators coming into the province. These were being processed long before Kenney response.
- Challenges: efforts to improve information-sharing within the org
- Conflicting messaging (e.g., Kenney said paid sick leave, but then said federal government would cover. State of emergency, but restaurants not closed, but bars open)
- Issue: guidance or determination from employer on how to keep immuno-compromised staff safe. Employers saying with PPE those staff can remain in workplace, only allowing staff performing aerosol-producing procedures to have N95 respirator and EMS staff. Becoming a work refusal issue.

Saskatchewan

- Two different standards: WHO said 14 quarantine a must for public, but for health care professionals arriving back in Canada before March 16 don't have to self-quarantine - Saskatchewan Health Authority is not being receptive
- Issue: telling health care workers they don't need to quarantine for full 2 weeks
- New legislation introduced today making it easier to access leave

- Provincial budget cancelled, but will provide spending estimates. Health care announcement expected.
- Cancer agency staff being told if you return from travel, just wear a mask and come in. No union involvement in discussions.

Manitoba

- Standards vary within the province and by classifications of job
- Communication from teachers: school divisions closing schools but teachers and support staff required to report for work. Directive that if you return to province by such a date, you don't have to do 14 day quarantine (varies by school division)
- Liquor inspectors begin told you can't go into the field, but must report to office
- Home care workers told you have to sit in-house (many people crowded into a room) and wait for hours. Looking at right to refuse
- Like other provinces, testing resources heavily stressed (e.g. phone lines overloaded, won't test if you haven't travelled internationally, new online screening tool)
- Question: any experience looking at supplementary employment benefits for workplaces being shut down?

Ontario

- For those in health care, info from WHO, PHAC, and provincial directives are inconsistent - could use help pushing at federal level for consistency (e.g. should we be isolating health care professionals for less than 14 days because we need health care professionals)
- Asked retirees to help at testing centres, TeleHealth volunteers
- Conference call systems are crashing, including TeleHealth as well as organizational
- 7 regional staff working from home
- Liquor stores: Reduced hours, limiting number of people in stores
- Government been listening to OPSEU. Ford government being surprisingly progressive, but unclear how long they can sustain paying people.
- Something to watch: impact of union dues on revenue
- Challenge is people not feeling safe going to work. Some workers (e.g. Service Ontario) threatening to walk off the job. OPSEU working on resolution, but a fear is that this will provide useful excuse for employer to privatize, concern for future of public services.

- Tension with province and medical officer: trying to get N95 mask designation changed, but challenge is limited supply, though production ramping up
- Senior advisor for SARS Commission have opposite lessons: transmission in health care low in China, containment succeeded; high transmission in Italy. Key point is masks.
 - Sara will circulate

Nova Scotia

- Province gradually shutting down, has been fairly proactive, listening to unions
- Regulatory agencies for nurses and doctors are fast-tracking retiree licenses, recruiting people for TeleHealth, administrative professionals from public service helping out
- Members self-isolating are still getting paid
- Some controversy around N95 and shortages
- Variance across government departments: some being told to work from home 1-2 months
- Reducing hours of liquor stores, as well as grocery stores and pharmacies
- Child care for members is a concern, school boards will continue to pay teachers, teacher's aides, school bus drivers - Sandra will circulate

New Brunswick

- Signed MOU with government for public service (circulated via email)
- Everyone will be paid, including casuals and part-time
- Daycares closed, but some open for essential workers. Working through those who are home but still paying for providers
- Government is limiting how many people going in person to clinics, enabling doctors to do consultation over the phone
- Constant communication with the government
- 14 day quarantine after travel regardless of symptoms, will be paid
- Some members sitting idle as non-critical services shut down
- NBU will circulate infection prevention guide

Prince Edward Island

- Public health state of emergency as of Monday: non-essential employees home with pay, wider closures
- Anyone traveling outside the country must self isolate with 14 days, home with pay on special leave. If develop symptoms, go onto sick leave under CA
- Government aware of financial burden on: \$25 million contingency plan for small businesses and self-employed people, to max of \$500.
- Suspended evictions
- Outstanding concerns: PPE - don't want to have N95 available for workers

CUBGW

- Bars and restaurant closures hurting draught beer sales
- Fewer hours at liquor stores and warehouses
- Worried about potential lay-offs, prices

6. Institutional and organizational response - including labour

- Share information on maintaining operations remotely
- Planning ahead regarding potential revenue impact
- NUPGE will convene another call in one week
 - As things change across the provinces, request to exchange information on changes to leave, EI, etc. in the meantime



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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