



# COVID-19 Conference Call Notes

March 25, 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

**Canadian Health Professionals Secretariat Conference Call re: COVID-19**  
**NUPGE Office**  
**15 Auriga Drive, Ottawa, ON**  
**March 25, 2020**  
**12:00 p.m. EST**

## **Participants**

<b>BCGEU/NUPGE</b>	Stephanie Smith Kari Michaels
<b>HSABC/NUPGE</b>	Val Avery Sheila Vataiki Jeanne Meyers
<b>HSAA/NUPGE</b>	Mike Parker Trudy Thomson Ray Geldreich
<b>SGEU/NUPGE</b>	Bob Bymoen Tracey Sauer Gene Marshall
<b>HSAS</b>	Karen Wasylenko Dustin McNichol
<b>MGEU/NUPGE</b>	Dianna Schulz
<b>MAAHCP</b>	Bob Moroz Lee Manning
<b>OPSEU/NUPGE</b>	Smokey Thomas
<b>NBU/NUPGE</b>	Joyce Aucoin Leigh Sprague
<b>NSGEU/NUPGE</b>	Lynette Johnson
<b>PEI UPSE/NUPGE</b>	Karen Jackson
<b>NAPE/NUPGE</b>	Jerry Earle
<b>AAHP</b>	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

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## 1. Welcome and introductions

Participants from 14 Components and CHPS organizations joined the call, as well as Larry Brown, NUPGE President, Bert Blundon, NUPGE Secretary-Treasurer and 4 NUPGE staff.

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

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

- The need for public health care and the damage that private health care has done is very evident in the pandemic. The first 3 deaths in Canada were at a private, long-term care residence where sick days, wages, and other worker protections were cut.
- NUPGE organized a call for corrections officers. Good information was shared between the provinces.
- NUPGE has a call upcoming with Canadian Blood Services – workers worried about protective gear.
- NUPGE wrote a story on women at risk for domestic violence increasing in the pandemic due to increased time at home with their abusers. Would like to provide more concrete recommendations on the issue. Any suggestions for resources should be sent to NUPGE.
- Pensions have been hit to some degree. The CLC is calling a conference call on pensions. NUPGE will have more information after the call and may schedule a call of their own.
- NUPGE sent a draft letter to Components to send to their health ministers re: urgent need for N95 masks, based on the Murphy report.
- Notes from last week's COVID-19 conference call and other documents were sent out and are available online <https://nupge.ca/content/documents-covid-19-conference-call>.
- There are variations between provinces on what's being labeled an "essential service." Some provinces are offering free emergency childcare for essential services workers. Some provinces are looking at implementing self-isolation for anyone coming from out of province – not just out of Canada.
- Emergency funds package was passed last night in the House of Commons.

- Some sector agreements in multiple provinces were nullified by state of emergency (e.g. shifting workers around and canceling vacations without following collective agreement). Have to be careful about how we approach this issue.

### **3. Current Situation**

#### **Newfoundland**

- Lines of communication are open with various government officials and multiple conference calls are taking place.
- Declared provincial state of emergency last week which gives government a wide range of powers.
- Significant concerns over the spread reaching major health care centres. Staff have had to self-isolate.
- Premier has said something is coming re: childcare for essential service workers.
- Trying to put a good neighbour agreement in place but concerns as they haven't addressed childcare or PPE needs yet.

#### **Prince Edward Island**

- Government reopened some liquor stores due to addiction withdrawal fears. Anyone that holds a license can deliver liquor – currently fighting that.
- Paid childcare for essential service workers.
- All non-essential employees told to work from home.

#### **Nova Scotia**

- State of emergency declared over the weekend.
- 51 cases as of yesterday morning. Implemented designated COVID-19 units.
- PPE issues for workers (getting it, people stealing it, etc).
- Provincial Health Authority holds daily phone call.
- So far, government is working with unions and following collective agreements.
- Government has sought a legal opinion on whether state of emergency overrides collective agreement.

- Layoffs are occurring in home support sector. Group homes have also started to lay off workers.

### **New Brunswick**

- Mobility agreement – bargain where the tradeoff is everyone continues to be paid (including non-essential service workers who are being asked not to work from home due to network issues) but gives employer the ability reassign staff as needed
- Childcare centres are open for essential workers, but under a two-tiered system. If they were previously using it, they continue paying for it. If they weren't using childcare before but need to now, government is paying.
- State of emergency declared (smaller list of essential services than Ontario).
- Anticipate receiving a lot of right to refuse unsafe work claims.

### **Ontario**

- OPSEU was the first union in the province to shut offices and switched to working from home.
- Have 7 teams (one for each region) that settle cases (e.g. some isolated LCBO managers were trying to send workers home for wearing masks to work).
- Shortage of PPE in hospitals, according to staff, but government claims no shortage.
- Some returning Canadians aren't honouring the self-isolation recommendation and stopping at the border or at grocery stores to shop before they return home.
- Dire shortage of nursing home staff before the pandemic which is even worse now.
- Government paying all employees, whether they're working from home or not.
- Service Ontario workers are calmed – traffic is down because licence and drivers licence renewals have been suspended, and the number of people who can go into a Service Ontario office has been limited.
- Shortage of childcare workers an issue as it's a low pay work for a difficult job (trying to keep kids apart, as per social-distancing).
- Many workers relying on grandparents to look after kids.
- Can override the collective agreement protections on transferring workers. Cancelled vacation, education, and union leaves. Many workers on union leave voluntarily went back.

- Had a call with government to talk about jails. Dozens of refusals of unsafe work from corrections workers.

## **Manitoba**

- Issues with management telling workers they're essential workers but government not deeming them essential enough for childcare spots.
- MOA written to survive an emergency but still worried if governments are ripping up collective agreements.
- Public lab workers can be redeployed to provincial labs.
- Flooding is imminent in some areas of the province, working on redeployment agreement for affected workers.

## **Saskatchewan**

- Province declared a state of emergency. Regina declared their own which limited even more limited services, province got them to back off and reopen some businesses.
- Some employers offering more money for community services jobs.
- Lines of communication are open with government.
- PPE is an issue. Social services has 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of employees in contact with the public.
- Working on a legal opinion regarding emergency services to step around isolation rule in healthcare and right to refuse unsafe work. Official opinion will come next week.
- 2,200 childcare spots open for children of essential workers. Doesn't help rural and remote workers.
- New phone line opened for non-medical questions.
- Healthcare workers returning from out of country previously weren't required to self-isolate – government has since changed mind after a group of doctors tested positive after they had returned to work.
- Workers report working at testing sites in the morning and then going to their regular jobs.
- Questions about funeral homes and how to handle bodies of people who have died from COVID-19.



- Leak of internal assessment of provincial trend (1/3<sup>rd</sup> of population is expected to catch COVID-19 if left unchecked).
- Feeling in rural Saskatchewan is that it will not reach them and therefore don't have to follow the rules of self-isolation.
- Concern from members over who is labelled essential vs non-essential.
- Determining who has access to childcare is an ongoing issue.
- Licensing and relicensing of people who have retired is ongoing.
- Proper PPE – especially for paramedics in rural Saskatchewan – is an issue.

### **Alberta**

- Childcare still open for essential service workers – burden is on worker to prove they're essential. Childcare is not free.
- Instituted temperature checks at hospitals for everyone who enters the building.
- Fast-tracking testing for staff self-isolated with symptoms.
- Lab sent out letter to workers saying they could be held for unprofessional conduct if they don't follow the rules of self-isolation.
- 14 days after travel, 10 days if you have symptoms but haven't travelled.
- Ramped up testing, bringing equipment to public labs.
- Lots of kudos from Chief Medical Officers on public services.
- Ongoing discussions about respiratory PPE. Unions saying one thing and employers saying another which is causing tensions in the workplace.
- Starting to pull equipment out of schools for cleaning.
- 3 unions in health care don't have consensus on PPE/N95. Accelerated use of equipment means they have 3 months left at current usage levels. One union's position is that anyone who wants a mask should have access. HSAA's position is in-line with PHAC and CDC's position, and is based on ensuring that supplies are available for frontline workers should the current rate of use and need continue unabated.

### **British Columbia**

- Working with a government that is labour friendly – government said collective agreements will be honoured.
- No longer allow workers to work in multiple long term care residences.

- BCGEU is in contact with employers daily.
- BCGEU COVID-19 team meets every day via Zoom.
- All BCGEU staff working from home.
- Layoffs happening in private sector. Public service layoffs haven't happened but some have been redeployed to other sectors.
- Wildfire season starting to ramp up.
- Childcare is an ongoing issue.
- Rent protection being announced today.
- BCGEU saying "core" or "critical" as opposed to "essential" workers.
- Government (even opposition) has been a model of non-partisan work.
- Government has put out an app to provide updates.
- Government says mask levels are fine, but workers are reporting thefts, being told to reuse, etc.
- Pay is guaranteed for all workers.
- 103.5% occupancy in hospitals normally, current occupancy is in 60% range with ICU beds around 50% occupied due to cancellation of elective surgeries and focus on discharge of patients because of the anticipated surge.
- Working to get hours protected at long-term care facilities since they can no longer work at multiple facilities.
- 173 people recovered after being diagnosed positive.
- HSABC reports difficulties working with BCNU.

## **CUBGW**

- Employer introducing new program for high risk employees. Currently being paid 60% of their regular wages to stay home and stay protected.
- Also raising incentive for brewery worker of \$5 per hour who are coming to work.
- Willing to top up government incentives to people in self-isolation to amount to 95% of regular pay. Union position is to make it 100%.
- Some members exercising right to refuse unsafe work.
- New cleaning procedures are in place.



## 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.

15 AURIGA DRIVE  
NEPEAN, ONTARIO  
CANADA / K2E 1B7

[613] 228-9800  
FAX [613] 228-9801

[www.nupge.ca](http://www.nupge.ca)

[national@nupge.ca](mailto:national@nupge.ca)

