



# **COVID-19 Videoconference**

**June 24, 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**  
**June 24, 2020**  
**12:00 p.m. EST**

## **PARTICIPANTS**

**BCGEU/NUPGE**

Joanna Lord

**HSABC/NUPGE**

Miriam Sobrino

**HSAA/NUPGE**

Mike Parker  
Trudy Thomson

**MGEU/NUPGE**

Michelle Gawronsky  
Charlotte McWilliams

**NSGEU/NUPGE**

Sandra Mullin

**NAPE/NUPGE**

Arlene Sedlickas

**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 6 Components 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 calls 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.

This will be the last Big Tent call before September. If something starts to change rapidly in any province, we will send out a call for participants and schedule a call as needed in the summer. Starting in September, the first week of every month will have a Big Tent call.

On June 29<sup>th</sup> there's a call with the Components to talk about reopening offices.

The federal government isn't in a hurry to reopen any of their offices. A significant number of people will likely be working from home on a permanent basis. Employees considered vulnerable by public health standards should keep working from home.

Worries in post-secondary education that online learning will be permanent for courses that do not require labs or shop time, those which do have those elements will resume in the fall.

PSI call on June 23<sup>rd</sup> found that nurses in the US are worried about being forced into a telehealth mode where they wouldn't be able to see patients directly. This is also a concern in Canada with the rise of telehealth here as well.

PSI call also solidified that the pandemic was made worse by 25 years of tax cuts, austerity, inequality, and government trade deals. The situations in Canada and the US are very similar, though significantly worse in the US. The increase in domestic violence that we've seen in Canada has also occurred in the US. The lack of affordable child care was another shared issue between countries.

Poll results are all over the map on who wants to work from home. Angus Reid says 36% of workers anticipate they'll go back to work, 20% said they'll stay at home. Women report more frequently that their mental health has suffered from working from home. 19% of Canadians like working from home. 40% said working from home is worse than being in the office.

In Alberta, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick, it is likely that post-COVID austerity is on the horizon. Alberta in particular is a big worry with legislation already moving which will harm workers.

A CHPS meeting occurred on June 23<sup>rd</sup>. Main takeaway was that we our members are on the frontlines and that we need to translate the lessons from COVID into bargaining demands which better protect workers. A meeting with the Federal Health Minister will be called for, though CHPS has called for this before and has not yet been successful.

Canada is facing a major labour shortage due to COVID border lockdowns which has reduced the numbers of immigrant workers available in Canada.

Countries that have lifted COVID restrictions too early are starting to see huge spikes. Germany was one of the first countries to start loosening rules and they have started lockdowns again now that they're having new spikes. WHO has warned that we're only just nearing the peak of COVID worldwide. It's imperative that we stay on top of social distancing measures and don't settle into thinking the pandemic is over.

### **3. Current Situation**

#### **NSGEU/NUPGE**

LPN big win made 400 people happy and 1400 not happy. NSGEU LPNs are covered by the win and will receive retroactive pay as part of the ruling by the arbitrator. NSGEU lobbying for the employers to expand this to all LPNs in the province. NUPGE also hosted a town hall meeting and have launched a joint campaign with other unions who have members excluded from the win.

Province is currently COVID-19 free as of June 23<sup>rd</sup> (14 days with zero cases).

Premier is reopening things rapidly with no warning for businesses and yet has not restarted government committee meetings.

Considering opening a maritime bubble first for out of province visitors, limiting visits to the other Atlantic provinces, before expanding to the rest of Canada.

NSGEU office has reopened and over 90% of staff are back to work (12 foot hallways allow for social distancing). Installed sanitizer stands around the building.

Small in person meetings have resumed though most are still occurring through Zoom. Have also started doing Zoom webinars to deliver education sessions.

Executive will meet in person in July.

Many members are still working from home. Anyone who can work from home is being asked to continue to work from home for now.

Seniors facilities just reopened for family visits (outside). Hospitals are also again open to visitors.

## **NAPE/NUPGE**

Provincial borders open on July 3<sup>rd</sup>. Going to level 2 on June 25<sup>th</sup> so bars will reopen at that time.

26 days of being COVID-19 free in the province. Only had 261 confirmed cases all together.

Liberal leadership race is heating up as current Premier has announced he is stepping down.

NAPE building is open for staff only.

Core government workers have gone back but if workers can work from home they're being encouraged to do so. Zoom meetings are being held from individual offices because there is not enough space to do in-person meetings.

College instructors are working remotely for summer session.

## **HSABC/NUPGE**

Office closed to the public in March but continued to have skeleton crew of workers. Looking to increase to 50% occupancy in July.

Latest modeling from Public Health Office shows social interactions have increased to 65% and she cautions against going any higher.

Press conference today is expected to lift some travel restrictions.

Telephone town hall for activists on June 22<sup>nd</sup> to explain virtual meetings and virtual convention plans (virtual convention would be to make up for the cancelled April convention. Still planning on holding an in-person convention in spring 2021 as it's an election year). Main concerns were still PPE/safety, particularly cleaning wipes.

Will be holding a virtual town hall for all membership on June 25<sup>th</sup> to explain the plans for the fall/winter (e.g. virtual convention can pass 15-20 resolutions instead of hundreds, maximum of 2 days instead of 5 days, etc.).

## **BCGEU/NUPGE**

Convention postponed from June 2020 to June 2021 and are exploring virtual and other ways to meet online.

Offices are still closed. Working on safety protocols and have surveyed membership and staff. Looking at a gradual return to office in mid-July but plans are still in discussion. Skeleton crew of staff have been working at headquarters throughout the pandemic.

Operations are business as usual. Education, bargaining, arbitrations, grievance appeals are all happening online.

Still concerns around pandemic pay. In particular, liquor stores and warehouse component have launched their own campaign (as part of the union) to the employer at their unhappiness at being left out of receiving pandemic pay.

BCGEU has a campaign out for essential workers in all components that were left out of pandemic pay.

Schools reopened on June 1 on a gradual and part-time basis. Looks like it will be a full open in September K-12. Online and hybrid models will likely be used for post-secondary.

Legislator reconvened on June 22<sup>nd</sup> for a six-week summer session.

Most government workers have returned to working in the office, but many workers in other sectors are still working from home.

## **HSA/NUPGE**

Impacts of legislation are starting to hit the membership and are creating a culture of fear and uncertainty.

HSA has been talking strongly about privatization for months but some members are still hurt and lashing out.

Health care workers in school (PUFF funding) has been scrapped and staff are affected. It's unclear whether HSA members will lose their jobs over this decision.

Mental health and addictions funding has been slashed (meaning drop in centers have been closed). Government gave 4 million to an online support system that requires a phone to access. Not having a phone is common among those with mental health or addiction issues.

Government has said many bills are still going to be passed before the fall.

A bill is in progress that would see a voluntary civilian core will begin working with police and RCMP.

AUPE has launched a lawsuit against Bill 1 which prevents rallies on areas which have been deemed essential or critical infrastructure, including highways, oil and gas infrastructure, railways etc.

Virtual board meeting happened last week. Planning for a fall in-person meeting with a caveat that it will be switched to online if it is unsafe.

Convention has been postponed until 2021. Produced a digital magazine with *Now Communications* in lieu of convention this year.

Office is open (3 levels of reopening guidelines) under strict safety procedures which will be maintained until September. Regular union business is still being conducted online.

On the weekend a group of Americans crossed the border with the stated intention of driving to Alaska. They were issued tickets for stopping and camping inside national parks.

Private member bills have been tabled. They want to repeal the *Voluntary Blood Donations Act* (HSAA thanked NUPGE for the letter of support on the issue). Proposed a bill about pension reform that attacks joint governance. Both are currently with the committee. It's likely the pension bill won't come to the house but the blood donation one likely will.

Last week the Premier put out his report from the 'Fair Deal Panel'. Want to hold referendum on a variety of issues. Doesn't go as far as separation but it's close. Talking about running referendums during municipal elections, possibly to dispose of more progressive mayors. Many aspects to try and make Alberta more autonomous.

Election financing bill came out yesterday. If there's a referendum, a group can spend up to \$500,000 for advertising but they only have to submit a report if they spend over \$300,000. Many other aspects skew towards allowing wealthy donors to influence elections.

Province has opened up and cases have started to spike. 5 restaurants and bars voluntarily closed after reopening because they had positive cases in their facilities.

People are starting to know people who have tested positive and are sick which has started to shift public perception.

Privatization RFP for lab services is going ahead (expected in September) and it's gone even bigger in scope than what was recommended in the MacKinnon report.

Bargaining has been postponed and word has been given that layoffs won't come until September.

Tentative plans to hold a telephone town hall in the summer to discuss all of the above.



## MGEU/NUPGE

314 cases of COVID in the province.

Cases have spiked since province started reopening.

Top doctor told province to “get used to having COVID-19 around”.

Businesses are complaining that workers don’t want to work because of CERB.

Premier announced that if people get a job and work 30 hours in 6 weeks they will get a cheque for \$2,000. The current criteria only has a 4 week application window, meaning it’s impossible to work 6 weeks. Premier claims he’s using money from COVID-19 funds which have not been claimed but not being transparent.

Started opening care homes for visits on June 22<sup>nd</sup>. Have begun building “care huts” which can be used for visits year-round.

Had a board meeting last week. Next board meeting is the regularly scheduled one in September.

Office is gradually reopening. Most of the admin staff are in. Reps are alternating which allows people to keep 6 feet distances. Directors are in 5 days a week. Looking at holding member meetings soon. Grievance and appeals meetings have been occurring online.

Government has filed an appeal on recent bargaining win on appointing arbitration panel.

Premier is officially the most hated premier in Canada and the worst premier Manitoba has ever had. Possible leadership vote upcoming. Minister Reg Helwer has been using a private business to complete government work—expect an announcement about this today.

Costs of the private lab are 3x what they were when they were in the public sector. People must wait in line in a mall to get in to access their services.

### Follow-ups

Task	Responsibility	Completed
Send any relevant documents to <a href="mailto:anaidoo@nupge.ca">anaidoo@nupge.ca</a>	Participants	
Update existing materials and circulate	NUPGE	
Schedule next call	NUPGE	



## 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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