



national
union

Report

COVID-19 Videoconference

October 28, 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 Videoconference
NUPGE Components and CHPS Members
October 28, 2020
Noon EDT**

Participants

BCGEU/NUPGE	Kari Michaels
HSAA/NUPGE	Trudy Thomson
HSAS	Karen Wasylenko Karen Schmid
MGEU/NUPGE	Charlotte McWilliams
OPSEU/NUPGE	Smokey Thomas
NSGEU/NUPGE	Jason MacLean Robin MacLean
NBU/NUPGE	Susie Proulx-Daigle Joyce Aucoin
PEI UPSE/NUPGE	Karen Jackson
AAHP	Gayle Foley
NUPGE	Larry Brown, President Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer Len Bush, Managing Director Anil Naidoo, National Representative Deb Duffy, National Representative Jeryn Daly, National Representative Nadia Ibrahim, National Representative

Welcome and introductions

Participants from 9 Components and CHPS allies joined the videoconference with Larry Brown, NUPGE President, Bert Blundon, NUPGE Secretary Treasurer, and NUPGE staff.

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

1. Opening Statement—Larry Brown, NUPGE President

Brown gave an overview of the current situation related to COVID-19.

He noted that we are at the start of the second wave and are hitting the milestone of 10,000 COVID-19 deaths in Canada. In Quebec, 30% of infections are from workplaces. It will be important to see how this assessment was done and what it means for tracking the spread in workplaces across the country.

On top of battling COVID, we are now battling COVID fatigue. This is concerning for the general population, but also a critical issue for overworked and overstressed health care workers.

Health care workers are protecting their families, and their rate of family infections is half the rate of households without health care workers in the home.

There are still great debates about aerosol spread and small droplet spread of the virus. Dr. John Murphy, an expert on occupational hygiene who did research for HSABC and NUPGE at the start of the pandemic, maintains N95s are required for health care workers. This is related to his review of the available research and the assessment that transmission is not only via droplets, but also via aerosol spread.

Long-term care concerns are again back in the news in Ontario, but very little has changed in how long-term care homes have been run since the start of the pandemic. This is deeply concerning as we enter the second wave of infections, with LTC residents and workers still as vulnerable as they were when the pandemic first began.

Teachers are also reporting burnout, because they are having to balance keeping classrooms safe and online learning.

Manitoba is working on legislation to force public sector union workers who make over \$75,000 a year to be included on a public list. The motive appears to be to have the public turn on union employees.

Conventions are delayed for all Components. The NBU and HSABC are both running online conventions soon. Pre-convention organizing might be more difficult than running the virtual convention itself.

We are seeing the signs of how right-wing governments will use COVID-19 as a cover to cut public jobs and to privatize.

The federal government's throne speech promised to work with the provinces on long-term care, national child care, national pharmacare, etc. Some premiers immediately objected. It is the job of unions to remind politicians that those programs are what the people want.

2. Current Situation

NSGEU/NUPGE

Things are relatively quiet in Nova Scotia on the COVID-19 front. Most cases are from people traveling outside the Atlantic bubble and/or traveling internationally. Increasingly, people are being fined for not self-isolating after travel.

Premier McNeil announced that he is stepping down as premier but staying on as an MLA. 3 candidates are currently vying for the job (each bringing different levels of hazards for labour).

Nova Scotia Liberals have been active about quelling any kind of "noise" coming out of labour.

There are some issues that bear watching for labour, and the Faculty association is on a countdown to a strike. There is a tentative agreement with the teachers after a year and a half (i.e., 24 days) at the negotiating table. They are currently taking an offer to their members.

The union's executive committee is meeting Friday, and we have a board meeting next week. The committee will be discussing what meetings will look like in 2021.

NBU/NUPGE

In New Brunswick, the numbers are rising due to travel-related cases and long-term care homes opening to receiving visitors. There are also cases in the north of the province arising from unknown sources.

Border officers have been redeployed to the northern part of the province to enforce social-distancing guidelines and hand out fines.

Hospitals are not overwhelmed with ICU cases due to early planning and reducing capacity, but they did get close to capacity at times.

COVID fatigue is being felt across the province. Health care staff have been told to not expect to be able to use vacation days for a while.

We have restarted some negotiations based on old mandates. Waiting on a new mandate coming from the newly elected majority Conservative government.

Convention is happening online this weekend. 22 NBU Components did Component meetings a month before Convention. Many groups did it virtually over Zoom, and some of the larger groups did it town-hall style. We also did some training with delegates to make sure they know how to use the app for convention. We implemented a requirement that all delegates have their camera on to make sure they are present. Executives were acclaimed for their positions, but committees will be elected.

Another issue we are hearing about is that insurance companies are exempting COVID from being classified as an Act of God on home insurance policies.

PEI UPSE/NUPGE

There is not a great deal to report. There has been only one COVID-19 case, which was related to travel.

There is an ongoing staffing crisis in the health care system, and COVID fatigue is hitting hard.

Bargaining has resumed.

Our convention has been canceled, but we have continued to hold executive meetings.

Teachers are also feeling COVID fatigue.

AAHP

In Newfoundland and Labrador, we only have 4 active COVID-19 cases, and these are all travel related. Whenever a plane lands with a foreign traveler, the government requires everyone on the plane to get tested.

Most departments in health care have gone back to regular operations.

The province enacted the Good Neighbour Agreement back in March. AAHP put in its notice to go to bargaining at the end of April, but there has been no response that this will occur.

New premier, Andrew Furey (elected in August), is an orthopaedic surgeon.

OPSEU/NUPGE

There are record-breaking COVID-19 counts in Ontario. Some parts of the province have been rolled back to a modified Stage 2. COVID fatigue is occurring here as elsewhere. The bulk of infections are occurring in hotspots, mostly urban areas, with less in rural areas.

OPSEU has engaged a consultant to assist with how to run an election at a virtual convention with over 12,000 voters. Poor internet connectivity in rural areas poses a problem for virtual conventions. The convention committee is planning for an in-person convention, but it is still unknown if this will happen.

Some members have taken Zoom training. Zoom promises end-to-end encryption, but some consultants say that true end-to-end encryption is impossible.

We are starting to see large numbers of layoffs in Ontario colleges. These are happening mostly to part-time staff, but also to some full-time employees. OPSEU is in the process of setting up a call with the college council.

All plans to return to work for Ontario public services have been put on hold due to the spike in infections.

No Ontario government employees have been laid off during the pandemic, but there have been rumblings that this could be on the table so we must remain vigilant. All public employees have been working remotely.

A “recovery” budget is being announced November 5.

Long-term care in Ontario remains a problem, though apparently PPE supplies are sufficient. Insurance companies are not renewing policies. There is a chain of retirement homes up for sale, because they cannot get the insurance renewed.

OPSEU offices remain closed. Some board members want them opened but have been instructed to rent a hotel conference room for meetings when required and to bill OPSEU. Staff are not allowed to go into regional offices without a supervisor knowing.

MGEU/NUPGE

Manitoba is seeing new daily peaks in COVID-19 infections.

One long-term care home, owned by Revera, has a client capacity of 277 and has 94 positive cases and has had 19 deaths. 14 more personal care homes (all owned by Revera), are all in critical status.

2 jails are in critical status (including Headingley Correctional Centre). A number of other jails are also reporting cases, but at lower levels.

There has been an increase in cases related to people taking public transit. Municipal by-law officers have been added to be able to hand out an increased number of fines for people in violation of COVID-19 rules.

MGEU's offices are still open, but access is under restricted guidelines.

The MGEU is gathering proposals for bargaining, but it doesn't expect to get to the table soon.

COVID testing is now taking place in private doctor's offices. Testing and contact tracing are all backlogged. The province is also sending tests out of province for analysis.

Some people are not isolating after they test positive: one person didn't disclose their status before surgery, which resulted in the entire surgical team being forced to self-isolate for 2 weeks.

The Manitoba government is not providing any money for paid sick leave. It is relying on workers applying for federal funding.

HSAS

The Sask Party won the provincial election, but mail-in votes may yield slightly better results for the NDP. The Buffalo Party (the Wexit party) came in second to the Sask Party in several regions. The election was basically focused on the economy.

There are currently 652 active cases in Saskatchewan.

The ongoing issue of access to N95 masks is a problem. We are told that stock is not the issue; the employers claim to just want to be cost effective. HSAS is pushing back against the idea of repurposing used N95 masks.

Labour continues to have daily briefings with the Ministry of Health.

Homeless shelters are cutting back on services because they are overflowing.

People are pushing for mandatory masking in public.

HSAS held a one-day AGM/Convention last week (by-law states that they have to hold an annual meeting). The event was paired back and dealt with only the essential issues. At one point, they had 50 people on screen, and it was too hard to see everyone. Participants had to be at home for the call, with a camera on always. We had Zoom technicians on the call to troubleshoot if needed.

HSA/NUPGE

Alberta is hitting more than 500 cases a day, but the provincial government is not talking about implementing any kind of lock down. There are some new restrictions on social gatherings (inside gatherings are limited to 15 people). There is no province-wide mask by-law.

Asymptomatic testing is no longer available due to the influx of symptomatic cases, which has overwhelmed the system.

A private lab held a media event at the airport, saying they are able to do rapid testing to enable travel.

HSAA is still using offices for small, masked, membership gatherings. Staff are not mandated back at the office.

HSAA's contract was up last March; bargaining has been delayed until March 2021. Some push-back from members who would like HSAA at the table, but province has guaranteed there would be no layoffs during this period.

Nurses are in bargaining, and it is reported that there are 250 takeaways currently on the table. Most HSAA members have no experience of takeaway bargaining.

There's a press conference today from the Alberta Federation of Labour's Stand up to Kenney campaign.

The AUPE wildcat strike spread to 45 sites (lots were just information picketing, and workers didn't walk off the job). HSAA members supported it, and management came out with intimidation tactics, which means HSAA has some education to do with its members related to these developments.

HSAA is doing several educational events over Zoom. A labour relations conference was held with more than 200 members.

All local meetings are starting and must have occurred before February. Most meetings are taking place on Zoom.

The UCP government is making life difficult for us. Their recent convention was slam after slam against labour and health care. This government is bringing 2-tier health care and right-to-work laws to the province. The legislative assembly is back in session now.

There's a threat of 11,000 jobs being privatized. If this passes, HSAA stands to lose around 2,000 members (lab techs). A decision on this is expected to come down at the end of November. Some rural members are lab and X-ray workers who cannot work in urban centres. Closures would effectively put them out of work permanently.

BCGEU/NUPGE

There is a tentative NDP majority government resulting from the recent election, with 500,000 mail-in ballots that still need to be counted.

A decision to have the public service return to the office came down in the middle of the election. The BCGEU is making sure people are aware of their health and safety rights, protocols, etc. The Premier says he is going to review with senior bureaucrats and see why this decision was made. This does not seem to be assured, as the government may reverse this decision by the bureaucrats.

There are rising case numbers since the Thanksgiving weekend. The provincial health officer has now ordered that no more than 6 guests can be allowed in home. The public are expected to wear masks inside public areas, but the government has stopped short of mandatory mask legislation.

BCGEU staff is working on rotation in offices. Members and activists are allowed to access offices, but on an appointment-only basis.

Resources

- Letters of support for Alberta wildcat strike
 - [BCGEU](#)
 - [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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