



COVID-19 Conference Call

April 1, 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
April 1, 2020
12:00 p.m. EDT**

Participants

BCGEU/NUPGE	Kari Michaels James Coccola
HSABC/NUPGE	Val Avery
HSAA/NUPGE	Mike Parker Trudy Thomson
SGEU/NUPGE	Bob Bymoen Tracey Sauer
HSAS/CHPS	Karen Wasylenko
MGEU/NUPGE	Michelle Gawronsky
MAHCP/CHPS	Bob Moroz
OPSEU/NUPGE	Smokey Thomas
NBU/NUPGE	Leigh Sprague
NSGEU/NUPGE	Sandra Mullen Lynette Johnson
PEI UPSE/NUPGE	Karen Jackson
NAPE/NUPGE	Trevor King
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 10 Components and 2 allied unions joined the call, as well as Larry Brown, NUPGE President, Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer, and 4 NUPGE staff.

2. Opening statement – Larry Brown, NUPGE President

Larry Brown welcomed participants to the call. He acknowledged that today is rent day for many people, and pointed to the [results of the poll](#) commissioned by BCGEU, NUPGE, and North99 on COVID-19 responses and the need for stronger protections for renters and homeowners.

Brown underlined the importance of social solidarity right now, including continued trust in public institutions and this has informed NUPGE's positions and messaging. It is concerning to see signs of breakdown of that solidarity, such as people not following physical distancing guidelines, giving rise to tension.

In Ireland, France, and Spain, governments have moved to nationalize all private health care delivery. This is something to watch, and could inform advocacy in Canada.

As anticipated, there are impacts on vulnerable areas, including workers in health care, corrections, and long-term care.

Upcoming NUPGE calls: occupational health and safety representatives (this Thursday), privatization researchers (Monday), weekly corrections call (Tuesdays), weekly general conference call (Wednesdays), and liquor representatives (Thursday).

Upcoming event: Viral Solidarity concert with David Rovics - Thursday, April 2 via [NUPGE's Facebook page](#).

3. Updates from Components

In their updates, participants were asked to speak about the arrangements for people in self-isolation in their provinces (i.e. are they getting paid, using sick leave, etc.). What follows is a summary of responses to that question, along with general updates. Note that more information on employment-related measures during COVID-19 are compiled in the comparison chart shared via the [meeting webpage](#).

Arrangements for employees who are self-isolating:

- BCGEU: There is no uniform response as it varies by employer. For example, in community social services those who have to self-isolate are home with full pay. In other areas if sick, employees use sick time, or go on EI.
- HSABC: In health and community sectors, paid general leave for people who are self-isolating (whether because in close contact or showing symptoms).

- HSAA: Those who are sick use paid sick time. Those who are told to self-isolate are getting paid. Those who contract COVID-19 at work are eligible for workers' compensation. For casuals and part-timers, they are getting paid if they've been required to self-isolate. If they are sick, same as always, no paid sick time.
- SGEU: Generally, employees use their leave provisions. Some collective agreements do allow members to be paid by the employer if they've been ordered to self-isolate by the medical officer.
- HSAS: Members should be getting regular pay and not have to use sick bank if told to self-isolate, but, in some cases health care workers are not exempt from this order unless required to maintain essential health care services or provide emergency care. HSAS has been asking how this is defined, but not getting an answer.
- MGEU: Employees are to use sick leave if they have it, or use EI if not. MGEU is pushing the province to top up EI.
- NBU: Those who are sick use sick leave. Those ordered to self-isolate (e.g. close contact of confirmed case) are on leave with pay. Those who are self-isolating because they've travelled are either on leave with pay or, if they travelled after government said not to, asked to use vacation or on leave without pay
- NSGEU: Public sector workers, those in isolation because directed by public health, are on paid administrative leave. Those who are sick use sick leave. Those who are able to work from home receive regular pay.
- PEI UPSE: Those without symptoms receive paid special leave with regular pay. Those with symptoms use sick time.
- NAPE: Paid special leave. Those whose travel was after the government order, are on their own. Those who get sick outside the workplace use sick leave. Those who get sick in the workplace are eligible for workers' compensation.

General Updates:

BCGEU

- Thanks to NUPGE for joining the poll. BCGEU has also done a joint petition calling for rent, mortgage, and utilities moratorium - hoping for changes provincially and federally.
- Province is controlling the supply chain of PPE and other essential goods and coordinating centrally.
- Province has supplied a list of who are considered essential workers.
- Some BCGEU members have tested positive.
- Supports for vulnerable population and people who work with them:
 - Downtown Eastside of Vancouver has a large vulnerable population. There has been a quick response to get them shelter and a safe drug supply. BCGEU has tried to help coordinate efforts, but members who work with those vulnerable populations have been saying they have little or no PPE. Lots of people are refusing unsafe work, and these services are already understaffed.
 - Cheque issue last week went better internally than reported by the media.
 - Province needs to do more to support vulnerable populations.
- Child care: province has rolled out child care services for public health and health service workers, social service workers, law enforcement, and first responders. As spaces are available, they will look at other workers who are considered essential. This applies to children under age 5. Child care services for children 5-12 are available through the school system directly.
- Recent change was made to make parking free at hospitals and sites owned and operated by the health authority, so that no one who works, visits, or is a patient will need to pay.
- Liquor stores: reduced hours, stores closed on Sundays, barriers for those on the front lines to protect for public interaction. Mixed reviews from members on how it's going.
- Provincial health officer has issued orders that workers in long-term care and health facilities must work at a single site. Due to patchwork system, many work at multiple facilities to make ends meet. One positive impact is an increase in pay for long-term care workers to bring them up to par with folks in health facilities - hope this stays

HSABC

- Long-term care: at least 12 sites impacted. This weekend the province created a database and asked those who work across sites to register preference of where they want to work. Cumbersome process, so some hiccups, but otherwise okay.
- Statement yesterday from BC health employers and BC Nurses Union. In last round of bargaining, nurses tried to address staff shortage issues and negotiated a “working short premium” which was to kick in today. An assessment would be conducted on unit and if it’s below baseline staffing or unusual workload needs, premiums are paid to the workers in that area (e.g. if 10 or less nurses, \$5 an hour; if 11 or more, \$3 an hour). The joint statement said we don’t have time for assessment right now, but we are going to pay premiums to every nurse, everywhere, doing frontline care until the end of April. HSABC had tried to encourage the employer not to do it or to offer something comparable to members, but was refused. So a bulletin was sent out notifying members and encouraged members to voice concerns to the health minister and employer. There has been serious concern from members, including targeted at the union. HSABC has also been met with frustration from the employer and health minister.

HSAA

- Government has halted rent increases and evictions, but there are still some issues.
- Cases - 77 health care workers have tested positive, including 1 death.
- Joint statement on PPE began with push from nurses for requirement that all those who want PPE should get it. Conference call initiative by the employer (with no government involvement), where unions were told there is a 3-month supply at current usage. Eventually signed a joint agreement with the employer (not government) on PPE. (Mike’s advice: in these discussions, get your specialists in the room to ensure best decision-making.)
- Schools - 25,000 educational workers laid off. Municipal governments in Edmonton and Calgary have done mass layoffs. These developments have resulted in a 40% reduction in CUPE Alberta’s membership.
- Government sources say more restrictions on isolation and social-distancing are on the way.
- Issues with members going into grocery stores in uniform after a shift and being shunned. HSAA reached out to UFCW to see if there’s a solution.
- Staff are being screened as they come into facilities.
- EMS members reporting First Nations’ putting up blockades.
- Public response: AHS has a 90% approval rating on how they’re handling it, Kenney has 60%, and Dr. Hinshaw, chief medical officer, has a 90% rating.
- Convention has been cancelled (not postponed), meaning next one is May 2021.

- State of emergency - AFL wants a joint statement to say don't do what Ontario is doing. HSAA discouraging against getting into the politics, instead focusing on members
- Criminal justice - efforts being made to keep people out of jail in the province.
- Disaster relief fund at HSAA created after Fort McMurray, "to be used in the event of a provincial emergency," but no system on how to access funds or who qualifies, so HSAA is welcoming suggestions.

SGEU

- Concern around self-isolation and leaves. If people who are immunocompromised can't go into work, they may be placed on indefinite leave - impact on health benefits.
- Cases - 5 in one correctional centre, scrambling to isolate, and make things safe.
- Little notice of layoffs yet, but know some will be coming. Recalls for summer employees may not happen. Question of how to look after benefits for them.
- Redeployment - survey went out to all staff in government. Some already happening within government across agencies. Unions are working together on this.
- Health provider working group- working with other unions to put out a joint statement on PPE; working on redeployment language (drawing on Manitoba agreements).
- Some First Nations communities are going into quarantine or restricting hours. Trying to figure out what this means for members who live or provide services in those locations.

HSAS

- HSAS staff working remotely since March 16.
- Health authority keeps talking about labour pools, but little clarity (e.g. training, scope of practice), and inconsistent orders across the province (e.g. one mask per day).
- Concern about mental health of members, anticipating some PTSD.
- Notice today that in long-term care, all staff will be screened before going in.

MGEU

- Rent increases put on hold Tuesday.
- Monday it was announced that all non-essential businesses are to remain closed for min. 2 weeks.
- MGEU offices closed, including Resource Centre, and staff working from home.

- Receiving many inquiries about right to refuse, what happens when there's no PPE.
- Concern about PPE supply
 - Health and finance ministers have alluded to the fact that federal government is treating provinces differently - concern about government creating tension and playing politics.
- Watching for spring flooding.
- Some highways workers have been redeployed to borders with SK and ON to stop traffic and ask people to self-isolate if they're coming into the province.
- Cases - 1 in Selkirk Hospital, 1 casino patron - members work(ed) in these facilities.
- Corrections: rules around quarantine for anyone who comes in
 - A Facebook page appeared to suggest moratorium on dues despite union working consistently on behalf of these members to address their concerns. The suggestion was being promoted by those who were in a high pay category and had been deemed essential.
- School closures - until further notice. School year is likely done. MGEU asked education minister to give a directive that all workers remain on the payroll.
- Liquor stores remain open, some limited hours.
 - Violence: people coming in, pretending to cough, sneeze, or spit on workers. MGEU in contact with employer to set up guidelines on number of patrons, etc.
- Many stores are being proactive on physical distancing in stores.
- Taxi drivers call for suspending licensing fees because some patrons aren't paying.

MAHCP

- Cases amongst membership:
 - 1 at St. Boniface Hospital, all echocardiology technologists have been sent home.
 - Cases in social work department at some hospitals.
- Continuing calls for PPE.

OPSEU

- Protective measures in almost every workplace.
- Corrections: individual employers, not governments, are causing issues.
- Issues with labour unity: Some unions, political parties trying to make this political.

- Chief medical officer (lots of power in state of emergency) issued a directive that Ontario Nurses Association is the only union they will consult with.
 - Other unions not happy with being excluded. Pressure on OPSEU to respond and discussions on role of the OFL.
- Liquor stores: open, but some closed because people are not showing up to work.
- Government is paying all its staff. Unclear how long they can do that.
- OPSEU pushing for an essential table for health care to talk about redeployment of staff, using NBU Labour Mobility Agreement language.
- Dire staff shortages in health care, especially long-term care, and there have been layoffs. OPSEU pushing for redeployment instead.
- Social tensions are rising, complaints about public sector still being paid when others are losing their jobs.
- OPSEU hadn't yet cancelled Convention, but since Toronto has outlawed public events until June, the convention is now cancelled with limited financial harm.
- Ford government has filled in gaps of federal funding. Ford says he's prepared to go further, seems to be listening to the concerns of labour.

NBU

- Working on joint statement on PPE with government, nurses' union, and CUPE, using Alberta agreement as a model.
- Redeployment: NBU trying to make sure people not in critical roles are finding opportunities for work to be redeployed under mobility agreement and, when those opportunities come up, that members are accepting them. Aim is to mitigate possible layoffs in the future.
 - E.g., workers in public libraries are staffing phone lines for provincial emergency benefit; conservation officers and forest rangers are working provincial borders.

NSGEU

- Redeployment: public service did a skills inventory, people are redeployed voluntarily.
 - E.g., Some helping with 811 calls about testing, others on the provincial border.
- Good neighbour protocol in place.
 - Long-term care facilities have made requests for staff from elsewhere due to shortages, but done on a volunteer basis. If there are no volunteers, health authority wants to be able to order people to go. More discussions are ongoing.

- Premier has doubled down on state of emergency and started enforcing it (e.g., fines).
- Lots of members working from home as much as possible.
- Cases: Employees at provincial health authority, staff and residents in long-term care. One case in the provincial health authority was doing administrative support in a COVID-19 assessment centre with no direct contact, so conversation with government about PPE and public health guidelines based on what's happening on the ground.
- Schools: closed until May 1 and NSGEU members in the schools will be paid until then. Online learning is rolling out.
- Liquor stores are following distancing measures, limiting number of patrons, protections for staff. Seems to be working relatively well.
 - Restaurants are permitted to sell liquor with delivery.

PEI UPSE

- Conference calls weekly with all unions and employer.
- 70% of non-essential staff working from home.
- Schools closed until May 11 and moved to online learning.
- Redeployment: unions working on a letter of agreement.
 - E.g., Highway workers deployed, doing screening at bridge, airports, and ferries. Conservation officers asked to police non-compliance with emergency orders.
- Liquor stores: 5/14 stores are open with safety protocols in place.
- In discussion with government around recall of seasonal workers.
- All cases to date are from travel, no community transmission.
- PPE concerns, including N95. Released a joint statement with all unions.
- Government has been working well with the union.

NAPE

- Cases: 120/175 cases are due to spread from a funeral home.
 - 379 employees are on self-isolation within Eastern Health
- Good Neighbour Agreement signed on Monday with other unions and government.
- Some members will likely be arguing for premium pay.
- Premier Ball was put on the spot about layoffs and said he is supporting public sector.

- Liquor stores: online orders only, can pick up at scheduled times. Seems to be working well.
- Community access for youth - challenges for workers who have to transport youth who are out in the community (in some cases not practicing distancing) back home.
- ECEs and child care centres expressed concerns about re-opening. Interim measure of \$200 per week for essential workers who can find their own (private) child care arrangements

4. Other issues and next steps

NUPGE will continue to convene these calls weekly. Going forward, we will schedule for 1.5 hours.

Brown thanked participants for their important work and asked them to take care.

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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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