

ALBERTA UNION OF PROVINCIAL EMPLOYEES

BARGAINING UPDATE

DECEMBER 11, 2020

**ALBERTA HEALTH
SERVICES (AHS)**

NURSING CARE

LOCALS: 041, 043, 044, 045 & 046

NEGOTIATING TEAM MEETS INFORMALLY WITH EMPLOYER AUPE NOT BACKING OFF ON DEMANDS

As you know, Alberta Health Services (AHS) approached your negotiating team in October seeking an extension to the suspension of bargaining that had been in place since spring and expired on the 31st of that month. Your bargaining committee responded with a completely reasonable set of requirements that would need to be fulfilled:

- Job security guaranteed until a new agreement is negotiated and ratified
- An employee/employer Joint Task Force to meet monthly
- Fill vacancies due to staff exhaustion
- Regular vacancy report updates

When AHS rejected these requirements, your negotiating team informed the employer we were ready to return to the bargaining table. That's when the Government of Alberta stepped in.

Last month, AUPE President Guy Smith responded to Alberta Finance Minister Travis Toews' request that the union reconsider their rejection of a continued suspension of bargaining. Working with your bargaining committee, President Smith reiterated what the negotiating team identified as your requirements to accept this proposal.

Following that, AHS reached out to your negotiating team to meet to discuss issues related to COVID-19. To be clear, this was not a bargaining session.

Your negotiating team raised a number of your concerns with the employer, including:

- Inadequate supplies of and improper allocation of PPE at numerous worksites
- Members (especially screeners at acute care facilities) are facing abuse and even being assaulted by hospital visitors refusing to wear masks or follow screening protocols; the lack of security for these members needs to be addressed immediately
- Staff are burning out from excessive overtime and wonder why when there are still so many unfilled positions
- The lack of trauma support; being on the front line of this pandemic for so long has members carrying a heavy burden of stress and mental anguish
- No direction on where WCB fits into this; AUPE's position is that if workers are being infected at work, it's clearly a matter for workers' compensation
- People going into quarantine being forced to use vacation time when their sick bank is depleted

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- Frustrations around hearing news about their workplaces from the media rather than their employer
- The number of positions that were left unfilled before COVID-19 is impacting patient care and staff burn-out now, particularly in rural areas
- Recent reductions in the qualifications required for screeners and contact tracers
- Extreme short-staffing among homecare workers
- Expanded duties and responsibilities of Health Care Aides (HCAs) with no increase in compensation
- AHS is not actively recruiting recently retired workers (or arbitrarily removing them from the casuals list) to fill urgent demand

The employer acknowledged that HCAs are working at a fuller scope than they are used to and agreed to take back the list of other concerns to their leadership. Talks between AUPE and AHS about the creation of a new position, “Comfort Care Aide” continue.

Your negotiating team wants to make it clear: our position on a suspension of bargaining remains unchanged from October and November. If the employer wants us to agree to suspend bargaining until spring, they need to agree to our very reasonable requirements and put them in a Letter of Understanding.

Our preference remains a return to the bargaining table. If Saskatchewan was able to successfully bargain with its health care unions during a pandemic, there’s no reason that Alberta can’t as well.

We will continue to update you as this situation evolves.

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