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Rally for Canadian Jobs

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There's a **Better Way** for Alberta than cuts and burdens for health care

By Heather Smith
President, United Nurses of Alberta

OVER the past week, as this edition of NewsBulletin was being prepared, United Nurses of Alberta's Executive Officers have been presenting UNA scholarship awards to young men and women enrolled in nursing programs across the province.

As I hand the envelope to the successful student, I quietly say there is some "small print" attached to the award – he or she must agree to stay in Alberta after graduation. After all, I say, we need their participation in our workforce, and we have achieved the best collective agreement in Canada. Their sponsors, UNA members, agree they want their son or daughter to stay in Alberta, but the chuckle of the moment is often replaced with a serious question: Will there be jobs?

While winter still lingers and spring is a hope away, there is no doubt that winds abound in this province. They are not yet winds of spring warmth, but certainly of a provincial election and, ominously, of the well known "knee-jerk" reaction to slumping oil prices.

Blame the budget woes on the cost of vital public services. Balance the "revenue hole" by reducing numbers of nurses, teachers and others who provide those services. Subtly suggestion that if public sector employees accept wage freezes or wage roll-backs, the job losses will be less. We have been here before and we know well that such implied promises cannot be depended upon in Alberta.

I have been very direct in my conversations with government, first with Health Minister Stephen Mandel and then with Tim Grant, the senior Deputy Minister appointed by Premier Jim Prentice to "talk to" public sector unions.

I told them our health-care system does not have enough capacity now to meet the needs of Albertans. That long-term care already betrays our responsibilities to seniors, and that home care also has a never-receding demand for services without the resources to respond. I told them that the ship is kept afloat by the sheer will of nurses and other providers dedicated to protecting and shielding patients. I asked: You want us to do more with less? *Seriously?*

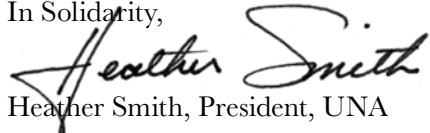
In 2014, UNA had three times as many professional responsibility concerns identified as grievances. Patient safety and health care worker safety should not have to be traded off for real revenue reform in Alberta.

UNA is non-partisan, but we cannot ignore the politics that surround public financing and political decision making. There are alternatives to diminishing health care services. There are alternatives to reinstating regressive health care premiums. UNA is a participant in the "Better Way Alberta" initiative. I encourage you to read the story in this edition of NewsBulletin and to check our the website www.betterwayalberta.ca.

Will your candidate bring real solutions to Alberta's revenue dilemma? You should ask and you should vote!

Your workplace, your family and your patients deserve a better Alberta. We don't want to export another generation of nurses educated in Alberta.

In Solidarity,


Heather Smith, President, UNA

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RETURN UNDELIVERABLE
CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
UNITED NURSES OF ALBERTA
700-11150 JASPER AVENUE NW
EDMONTON AB T5K 0C7

Seniors advocates call on government to fix long-term care crisis

PUBLIC Interest Alberta's Seniors Task Force released a position paper on December 16, 2014 on Long-Term Care calling on the Alberta government to fix the growing crisis in seniors care.

Sixteen organizations represented on the task force are deeply concerned that the Alberta government will not change a policy that caps the number of long-term care beds and continues to fund seniors care 19 per cent below the national average.

"For too long our long-term care system has faced constant underfunding and privatization," said Heather Smith, United Nurses of Alberta President.

"Increasing the number of public long-term care beds with appropriate staffing levels will ensure residents receive the safest and most cost-effective care possible," said Smith.

Studies done by the OECD indicate that the 34 member countries have on average enough long-term care capacity for 4 per cent of their population over the age of 65. By that count, Alberta should have about 20,000, a shortfall of nearly 6,000 beds.

"The crisis in seniors care can be largely addressed if the government is willing to invest in building enough long-term care places to meet the current and future needs and to


employ more medically trained staff to increase the number of care hours from 3.6 to 4.5 hours a day," said Noel Somerville, the Chair of Public Interest Alberta's Seniors Task Force.

"The Prentice government needs to revise its six-year-old Continuing Care Strategy that caps the number of LTC beds at 14,500 and stop putting public funds into building more corporate run supportive living facilities that charge families huge amounts of money for extra care and supports," Somerville said.

The release of this position paper comes as Alberta Health Services concludes the continuing care system review that they have been quietly conducting for the past six months. The Seniors Task Force is calling for the report and recommendations of the Continuing Care Resolution Team to be publicly released.

"People are getting frustrated and angry when they hear that seniors and their families are not getting the care they need in the final years of their lives, and are not going accept this government continuing on as if the seniors care strategy is working," said Bill Moore-Kilgannon, Executive Director of Public Interest Alberta.

"While AHS has just wrapped up its review of our continuing care system, unless Albertans start speaking out and telling their stories about senior's care system, I am afraid that little will change with the government," said Moore-Kilgannon.

Read the full report at pialberta.org. 



UNA President Heather Smith speaks to the Public Interest Alberta Seniors Task Force press conference on December 16, 2014.

CFNU asks front-line nurses to put safety first in 2015

THE Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions is urging nurses and other health care workers to put safety first in 2015 by making the health and safety of health care workers, patients and communities a top priority.

This includes dealing with serious infectious diseases, and the CFNU released a video in January 2015 about the state of Canada's preparedness for Ebola Virus Disease with the key message that we must protect the safety of nurses who care for patients.

"CFNU is committed to ensuring we don't fail health care workers as they care for their patients."

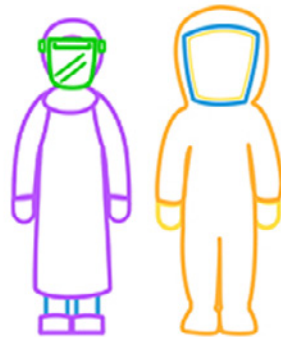
- CFNU President Linda Silas

"Front-line health care workers learned a lot from the SARS and H1N1 crises," said CFNU President Linda Silas in a news release published January 16. "A weak response to the Ebola threat means we failed to heed those lessons.

"CFNU is committed to ensuring we don't fail health care workers

as they care for their patients," she stated.

CFNU and provincial nurses unions are working with public health care agencies and provincial governments across Canada to ensure proper protective equipment, training and staffing are available to protect health care workers. 🍷



A safe workplace means proper protection from Ebola exposure.



Important correction to 2015 Nurses Planner

UNITED Nurses of Alberta's 2015 Annual General meeting will take place on Oct. 27, 28 and 29 in Edmonton.

Unfortunately, incorrect information appears in the 2015 Nurses Planner which is now



being distributed to UNA members. UNA's Communications Department regrets this error. 🍷

UNA and AHS Ebola meetings to continue

UNITED Nurses of Alberta representatives met frequently with Alberta Health Services and Infection Prevention and Control officials in late 2014 to discuss issues related to preparedness for Ebola Virus Disease. Both the employer and union representatives agreed to continue meeting in 2015 as needed.

UNA representatives have raised concerns brought forward by UNA

members over the past few weeks about the protocols, signage, and proper training and equipment available for treating patients thought to be infected with Ebola.

More information from AHS on Ebola can be found at albertahealthservices.ca/ebola or by calling the dedicated AHS Ebola Info Line at 1-866-301-2668. 🍷

In 2015, push back when there is pressure to make workplaces less safe

By Dewey Funk
UNA OH&S Advisor

ON April 28, UNA members and other unionists throughout Alberta and Canada will solemnly remember the countless workers killed and injured on the job.

Ceremonies and sad stories are not enough. April 28 – the Day of Mourning for Workers Killed or Injured in the Workplace – must be an occasion for re-commitment to health and safety in all of our workplaces.

Don't just look back! On April 28, look forward for ways to change workplace to make them safer and healthier.

This is of particular concern in 2015 – especially to Registered Nurses and Registered Psychiatric Nurses – because we all know the massive cuts to government budgets proposed by Premier Jim Prentice will have deep and harmful impacts on workplace safety.

Enforcement, safe staffing levels, new safety programs will go out the window. Employees will be pushed to work longer shifts and more shifts alone. These changes will have negative impacts on attention to health and safety. Security, already a problem, will get worse.

Employers will be pushed to cut corners to save money in ways that compromise the employee and patient safety.

When a tragedy results, government and employers will express sympathy but deny they had anything to do with it.

Times like these call for UNA members and other public sector employees to push back and aggressively enforce our right, and the right of our patients, to safe health care workplaces. More than ever, our commitment needs to be more than just once-a-year talk, but an everyday attitude.

Look around your workplace now. Are injured colleagues working modified work programs? Were their injuries due to being pushed to work faster and harder because of short staffing, inadequate equipment, or being attacked by a patient?

Now take a look at the root causes of the workplace injury. It's never "just" the person injured.

Even without the government's emphasis on cutting costs and cutting services, health care is already one of the most risky fields for workplace injury. It's up to us to make sure it doesn't get worse.

This year more than ever, make a commitment to yourself that when you go to work as a nurse you will take the time to do your job in a healthy and safe way. If the employer throws up roadblocks, involve your union immediately. 🍷

Extendicare purchases 31 Revera facilities across Canada

A PRIVATE sector business deal with possible implications for United Nurses of Alberta and other health care unions took place in mid-January, with Extendicare Inc. purchasing 31 seniors' care facilities in six provinces including Alberta from Revera Inc.

The \$83-million deal was announced January 15 and affects approximately 5,700 Revera employees. Revera's facilities are located in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia.

Extendicare already employed about 5,200 people in 50

communities in Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario.

Extendicare said it intends to finance the deal with the returns from its sale of most of its U.S. assets, planned for the second quarter of 2015.

By swallowing Revera, Extendicare becomes the largest home care services provider in Canada. The Ontario Public Service Employees Union slammed the deal, saying it will leave Ontarians in particular with little choice in home care providers.

UNA represents Registered Nurses at nine Extendicare sites and six Revera sites in Alberta. 🍷

UNA continues negotiations at smaller worksites

BARGAINING continues for new collective agreements for United Nurses of Alberta members employed at smaller worksites throughout Alberta.

UNA members employed by Carewest, Chantelle Management, Shepherd's Care and Touchmark at Wedgewood and Venta Care Centre have recently concluded negotiations by ratifying new collective agreements.

In January and February 2015, UNA continued bargaining with The Good Samaritan Society, Salvation Army Agape Hospice, Hardisty Health Centre, Capital Care – Edmonton, Bethany Care Society, and Salem Manor.

UNA provides a wide range of services to its members. A key role is negotiating the excellent collective agreements that regulate salaries, benefits, schedules and working conditions of members. UNA also administers its agreements to resolve disputes, improve working conditions and protect nurses' workplace rights. 🍷

United Nurses of Alberta's bargaining committee continued negotiations for a new contract with The Good Samaritan Society on January 19, 20 and 21, 2015. In photo (left to right) Jeannine Arbour (Labour Relations Officer), Linda Wu (Local 316), David Harrigan (UNA Director of Labour Relations), Cindy Caragata (Local 223), Steven Johnson (UNA Negotiations Committee Co-Chair) and Jacqueline Sevcik (Local 212).



Members of the United Nurses of Alberta Local 118 Negotiations Committee bargaining with Touchmark at Wedgewood. Left to right: Carmen Mahon (Local 118), Marites Banaag (Local 118), Steven Johnson (Provincial Negotiations Committee), Francia Delacruz (Local 118), and Jeannine Arbour (UNA Labour Relations Officer).



Closing urgent care beds to save urgent care beds makes no sense: UNA

MANY Alberta nurses were concerned by the opinion expressed by an Edmonton Journal editorial in December that the solution to a shortage of beds in Alberta's urban hospitals is closing beds at rural sites.

While admitting that "closing hospitals could deal a fatal blow to struggling rural communities," the author of the Journal's December 9 editorial argued that since many rural hospitals were built before modern air-ambulance service was developed, they should be used as urgent care centres only with critically ill patients flown to Alberta's cities.

"Closing urgent care beds because we need more urgent care beds is not a sensible solution," UNA President Heather Smith said at the time.

"...save Alberta's smaller communities and provide the services Albertans need where they are available."

- Heather Smith

She argued that while urgent care beds obviously need to remain a high priority in Alberta's cities, "as an interim measure before that problem

can be addressed, surely it makes more sense to use the rural beds we have available now, save Alberta's smaller communities and provide the services Albertans need where they are available."

In the short-term, even in the midst of an oil "price trough," needed upgrades to rural hospitals are relatively affordable, she said. "And the sites are available and working now, whereas development of urgently needed urban mega hospitals will take years, even if we start right now instead of ordering more studies to prove what we already know, as Health Minister Stephen Mandel has suggested." 🍷

UNA to take to airwaves to speak up for nursing

UNITED Nurses of Alberta is speaking up about health care in Alberta on behalf of its members, their patients, families and all Albertans.

In a radio advertising campaign that begins March 9th, the union for 30,000 Alberta Registered Nurses

and Registered Psychiatric Nurses will remind the public that cuts to health care and the inevitable impact of cuts on nursing will contribute to a significant problem for patient care.

With major changes to health care funding being talked about daily by the government, the two

30-second radio spots that will be heard throughout Alberta will aim to help Albertans see through the competing claims to understand what's wrong with the idea cuts are the only option. 🍷

As soon as the campaign begins, recordings of the spots will also be posted on UNA's website, www.una.ab.ca.

1985 – Alberta enacts Nursing Homes Operations Regulation.

February 2012 – UNA Labour Relations Director David Harrigan writes Alberta Health Services and Health Minister Fred Horne regarding failure of some nursing homes in Grande Prairie, Medicine Hat, Edmonton and Hardisty to fully comply with RN staffing provisions of the Nursing Homes Operations Regulation.

March 2012 – Harrigan writes AHS and then Health Minister Fred Horne about the ongoing situation in Grande Prairie, Medicine Hat, Edmonton and Hardisty.

March 2012 – Having received no reply, Harrigan writes a second time to AHS and Horne about the situation in Grande Prairie, Medicine Hat, Edmonton and Hardisty.

May 2012 – Horne responds, saying some sites are now in compliance and AHS is working with another site to ensure it will be.

UNA concern grows as nursing home operators ignore staffing regulations and AHS fails to enforce law

UNITED Nurses of Alberta is increasingly frustrated by the apparent reluctance of Alberta Health Services and the Alberta Government to enforce the Nursing Home Act and its required-staffing regulations.

“The failure of some Alberta nursing home operators to ensure levels of staffing required by law in their facilities and the reluctance of AHS and the province to enforce the regulations amounts to a serious assault on the rights of seniors in care,” said UNA President Heather Smith.

“For several years, Alberta Health Services and the government have responded to reports nursing homes are not obeying staffing regulations by saying they are looking into the problems and will deal with them, but not following up with timely action,” she said.

“Practically speaking, AHS and the government appear to be prepared to ignore the government’s own laws and regulations,” Smith stated.

October 2014 – Report of the Auditor General of Alberta agrees with UNA’S position on staffing as per the regulations is essential and that at least one RN must be on duty at all times or, in cases where an RPN is on duty, available on call. The AG also expresses concern about the level of AHS monitoring.

November 13, 2014 – Harrigan contacts AHS Chief Operating Officer Deb Gordon by email regarding the failure of a private facility in Athabasca to comply with the regulations and requests she require the facility to comply.

At issue are three requirements in the Nursing Homes Operation Regulation:

- That all nursing homes have on duty at all times a Registered Nurse, Certified Graduate Nurse or Registered Psychiatric Nurse
- That all nursing homes have a Registered Nurse or Certified Graduate Nurse on call if the only nurse on duty is a Registered Psychiatric Nurse
- That in the event an RN or Certified Graduate Nurse cannot be on site for a period of time, an RN or Certified Graduate Nurse is on call

In one recent case, said UNA Labour Relations Director David Harrigan, a private, for-profit nursing home run by Extendicare Canada in Athabasca has been refusing since last fall to staff the site with RNs at any time.

In response to repeated queries from UNA and the union's demands Extendicare comply with the Nursing Homes Operations Regulation, which was adopted by

the Alberta Government in 1985, AHS has repeatedly told UNA it is looking into the problem and has not arrived at a final position.

This month, AHS Chief Operating Officer Deb Gordon informed UNA that Extendicare had implemented an "LPN model" of staffing due to difficulty recruiting RNs, and that the company is no longer recruiting RNs. Gordon told UNA the company on its own decided using only LPNs "has become an effective staffing model that is providing quality resident care." She also AHS wanted more time to deal with the situation.

UNA's position is that it has been clearly established Extendicare is operating in violation of the regulations and no more investigation is needed.

Harrigan said the union raised the issue in a subsequent meeting with Health Minister Stephen Mandel and is now awaiting his response.

If the government and AHS continue to put off enforcing the law, UNA will have no choice but to seek arbitration or a remedy in the courts, he concluded. 🍷

January 13, 2015 – Harrigan and UNA President Heather Smith raise the issue during a meeting on health care financing with Mandel. Mandel promises to look into the matter again. UNA holds off on legal action pending the outcome of the minister's effort.

December 19, 2014 – Harrigan writes again to Mandel noting UNA has not received a response and requesting enforcement of the regulation.

December 4, 2014 – Harrigan writes Health Minister Stephen Mandel to request Alberta take steps to ensure the regulation is enforced in all Alberta nursing homes, especially the Athabasca site.

November 22, 2014 – Harrigan responds to Gordon saying no further review is required as it is acknowledged by all parties the company is operating in violation of the regulation.

November 22, 2014 – Gordon responds to that email, saying AHS is reviewing the situation and has not arrived at a final conclusion.

November 22, 2014 – Harrigan responds to Gordon, reminding her of Horne's commitment to ensure the regulations are obeyed and stating that the company is in direct violation of the regulation. He repeats UNA's intention to write the minister and, if that yields no result, to seek arbitration or a writ of mandamus from the courts instructing the government to enforce the regulation.

November 17, 2014 – Harrigan contacts Gordon to inform her UNA remains concerned by the situation and to notify her of UNA's intention to contact the minister.

November 22, 2014 – Gordon responds, saying AHS has investigated the matter and has learned the company has implemented an "LPN model" of staffing due to difficulty recruiting RNs, is no longer recruiting RNs, and when an RN is not on site to supervise LPNs, one is on call.

Time for spring cleaning? Be green ... and be safe!

SPRINGTIME in Alberta will soon be upon us, and with it the urge for many of us to do a little spring-cleaning. Just remember, cleaning products can be hazardous to the environment ... and to your health. What to do?

- **Use reusable cloths:** Rather than single-use items like paper towels and mop pads, old T-shirts and other rags can do the same job.
- **Minimize use of bleach:** Bleach can cause environmental harm when it gets into water – so try to use as little as possible.
- **Follow product instructions:** That is to say, use the minimum recommended amount of cleaning products.
- **Keep containers dry:** When you store cleaning products, take measures to ensure the containers don't corrode and leak.

- **Dispose of hazardous cleaning products properly:** Don't put them in the garbage or a drain, but take them to a municipal disposal location.
- **Use safe do-it-yourself alternatives to commercial cleaners:** vinegar and water to clean windows, vinegar and baking soda to clear drains, salt and lemon juice to clean brass, vinegar to remove rust.
- **Try to avoid cleaners containing phosphates:** When phosphates get into rivers and lake, they cause algae blooms that can kill aquatic life.

The U.S. government publishes a useful guide to the contents of household cleaners and other products, found at hpd.nlm.nih.gov/. The Canadian government doesn't seem to do this kind of thing, although the Nova Scotia government does, with its guide found at www.lesstoxicguide.ca/. Additional information can be found on the website of the David Suzuki Foundation, www.davidsuzuki.org/. ♡

Green corner, on environmentally friendly topics likely to be of interest to UNA members, is brought to you by the Advocacy and Engagement Committee.

Show of Solidarity



IN A SHOW of solidarity on February 3, representatives of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions from across Canada including members of United Nurses of Alberta joined striking nurses and others on the picket line at an Ontario Community Care Access Centre worksite in Smiths Falls, Ont. About 3,000 CCAC health professionals represented by the Ontario Nurses' Association were forced onto the picket lines by their employer, funded by the government of Ontario, as they tried to negotiate a fair collective agreement. The ONA members returned to work on February 17 and their dispute will be sent to an arbitrator. UNA President Heather Smith is at the far right. ♡

Alberta should rewrite labour laws to comply with Supreme Court ruling: David Harrigan

THE Supreme Court of Canada's January 30 ruling that Saskatchewan's "essential services" law is unconstitutional because it interferes with the Charter-protected right of all workers to bargain collectively, including going on strike, creates a serious potential problem for Alberta.

But it need not be impossible or even difficult to bring Alberta public sector labour laws into conformity with the Canadian Constitution, the country's supreme law, United Nurses of Alberta's Director of Labour Relations told media immediately after the court's decision was handed down.

"If the government is as concerned about the financial situation as they claim ... instead of spending money on lawyers fighting legislation the Supreme Court has said is not valid, they should be ... re-writing some of the labour codes," David Harrigan told the Edmonton Journal in an interview.

UNA was an intervener in the case because members face similar, and even more severe, restrictions on their right to strike than do the Saskatchewan nurses and other public sector employees who brought the appeal against that province's labour laws.

The case had its beginnings more than a decade ago in a B.C. dispute over a provincial law that tossed out a public health care union's collectively bargained contract. The B.C. case eventually made its way to the Supreme Court, which in 2007 explicitly extended the right to freedom of association guaranteed to citizens by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to include the right to free collective bargaining by groups of workers.

At the time, it was obvious this was a significant decision, but many legal scholars expected the court to roll back the sweeping nature of the ruling in later cases.

However, on January 30 this year, the Court ruled on several cases that had challenged legislation introduced by the conservative Saskatchewan Party not long after it was elected in 2007.

The Saskatchewan law required employers and their employees' union to agree which workers were essential and, if they couldn't, to let the government decide for them. The government could declare all workers at a worksite essential.



"Instead of spending money on lawyers fighting legislation the Supreme Court has said is not valid, they should be ... re-writing some of the labour codes."


David Harrigan

The law was challenged by the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses, the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour and other labour groups, and thereafter made its way through the courts. The Regina Court of Queen's Bench ruled it unconstitutional in February 2012, and the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal reversed that decision in 2013.

In a 5-2 decision, the Supreme Court sided with the first court and ruled the law unconstitutional. It gave the province a year to come up with a new version consistent with the Charter.

This does not mean the matter is at an end. Other provinces also have laws severely restricting the right to strike.

In 2013, the Alberta Legislature passed legislation affecting one union that would have prevented the use of binding arbitration to settle a dispute that could not be resolved in bargaining. Another law still on the books even bans the Charter right of any Albertan to express the opinion public employees should strike.

Harrigan's point is simple: The Supreme Court has spoken. Alberta needs to draft new laws that take reasonable measures to protect the public while allowing working people their right to full collective bargaining. 

PENSION UPDATE

Now is time to ensure LAPP changes protect benefits and protect true pension sustainability

UNA members and other Alberta public sector employees need to be aware Alberta Treasury Board and Finance has not lost its appetite for change that would make public sector pensions “sustainable” – on the government’s terms.

Just because the government hasn’t announced its intentions before an expected election doesn’t mean department officials aren’t thinking about reforms similar to those introduced in 2013, then dropped in the face of strong political pressure from plan members and their unions.

The changes announced in 2013 to the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the pension for most United Nurses of Alberta members, were to have taken effect on January 1 next year. They included removal of the “85 Factor” and higher early retirement penalties.

While the LAPP Board, actuaries and even the government acknowledged at the time the LAPP was not then in a crisis, the department refused to engage in meaningful governance or plan design discussions with stakeholders.

The government is now being politically sensitive and not announcing any changes, but the possibility of benefit reductions remains the subtext of official “sustainability” talk.

However, with the Prentice Government voicing support for a new LAPP jointly sponsored by employers and employees, there is an



opportunity for the parties to embark on mutually agreeable pension governance discussions.

UNA and other unions affected are prepared for this discussion, and

support a bicameral structure in which unions and employers have overall control and a board of trustees directs plan administration and investments.

But affected unions and their members may have to push back again to ensure LAPP emerges with an acceptable governance structure under which employees and employers who pay for the plan have control, and that leaves retiree and member benefits unchanged.

That means UNA members must be prepared in 2015 to show support for real sustainability of the LAPP. 🍷

UNA members who left work after 2013 may be eligible for lump sum payments and retroactive pay

UNITED Nurses of Alberta members whose employment has ended for any reason before the new Provincial Collective Agreement is signed are still eligible to receive retroactively any increases they would have been eligible for in the agreement if they’d remained on the job.

However, under Article 1.03 of the new contract, they must make a written application to the employer within 90 calendar days of the signing of the agreement.

This means any Alberta Health Services, Covenant Health, Lamont Health Care or Bethany (Camrose)

employee who worked in 2013 and has since left their employment is entitled to the 2013 lump-sum payment. If they also worked in 2014, they will in addition be eligible for retroactive pay.

Please watch the UNA website for notice of when the contract is signed and the 90 day period begins. Employer contact information is also available on the UNA website.

UNA members who are aware of former employees who may qualify for these payments are encouraged to contact both UNA, 1-800-252-9394, with the name and their former co-worker with the information if possible. 🍷

Unexpected AHS 'cost-containment measures' in February could do far more harm than good, UNA President warns

SUDDEN shifts in direction like the “cost-containment measures” announced by Alberta Health Services on February 5 have the potential to jeopardize patient safety by making existing staffing problems faced by front-line health care workers more severe, United Nurses of Alberta President Heather Smith warned.

“Front-line staff struggle every day with over-capacity issues,” Smith said. “Inadequate staffing levels persist across the province and a hiring chill or hiring freeze is only going to further compromise patient care.”

“We have a collective agreement in place and those parts of the announcement that do impact our members will be addressed through the normal labour relations process,” Smith stated in response to the news conference called unexpectedly by AHS Chief Executive Officer Vickie Kaminski.

In addition, she said, the answer to sick leave requirements by front-line health care workers is adequate staffing, not the kind of punitive “attendance management” programs proposed by Kaminski.

It’s dangerous for patients to require health care professionals to be at work when they are ill with

infectious conditions, Smith said. “UNA will work aggressively to ensure RNs who are sick get the sick time to which they are entitled by the collective agreement that we have negotiated, a requirement that benefits the entire health care system.”

“Inadequate staffing levels persist across the province and a hiring chill or hiring freeze is only going to further compromise patient care.”

– Heather Smith

“Our members know that we have no intention of reopening the collective agreement negotiated with AHS over the past two years and signed in August 2014, and Ms. Kaminski acknowledged that this cannot be done,” Smith emphasized.

Nevertheless, Smith said, major changes in direction like those announced on February 5 suggest AHS is reacting with a sense of panic to the political needs of the government and cyclical shifts in the economy.

“This does no good for health care in Alberta or for that matter for the

economic stability of the province,” she said. “AHS should be another voice in this province calling on Premier Jim Prentice to address our revenue deficits to ensure stable and predictable funding for essential public services like health and education. Alberta’s ability to meet the needs of our citizens should not be dependent on the price of oil.”

Smith said UNA is particularly concerned about the message the AHS announcement sends to nurses about to graduate from programs across the province. “We need Alberta-educated nurses to remain in Alberta,” she said. “Austerity measures during the Klein years resulted in the loss of a whole generation of Alberta-educated Registered Nurses.”

“Alberta’s Registered Nurses will be monitoring the implementation of these plans carefully with a commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our patients, their families, the public and the quality of service delivered in Alberta’s health care system,” she said.

Smith urged UNA members to continue to contact the union with examples of where and how AHS is wasting money so that information can be passed on to the government. 🐾

United Nurses of Alberta members joined their AUPE co-workers on December 10, 2014 for a noon-hour rally against job cuts being imposed by Covenant Health. The rally was held outside the Edmonton General Continuing Care Centre in downtown Edmonton.





The eight volunteers to the Fall 2014 Young Nurses Take Action mission from UNA Local 301 in Edmonton, from left to right, Nicole Van Dijk, Dianne Cortez, Melissa Alexander, Sarah Fulmer, Maria Clonfero, Alli Leithoff, Maggie Danko and Jennifer Castro.



UNA grant, Edmonton volunteers, help Floating Doctors in Panama

LAST fall, with the help of \$1,000 humanitarian project grants from United Nurses of Alberta, eight Edmonton volunteers from Young Nurses Take Action joined a Floating Doctors mission to Bocas del Toro, Panama.

The three-week experience was eye-opening, challenging and very rewarding, remember say the Local 301 members, Jennifer Castro, Maria Clonfero, Nicole Van Dijk, Dianne Cortez, Melissa Alexander, Sarah Fulmer, Alli Leithoff and Maggie Danko.

The two UNA members took part in two four-day camp clinics in nearby indigenous communities – sleeping in hammocks and living on rice and beans, and providing medical assistance to more than 300 people. The group also held day clinics and visited a nursing home in the region.

“There are so many experiences from this three weeks that writing a brief summary is difficult, so I decided to include a journal entry from my most memorable experience,” wrote Castro. “I helped deliver a healthy little baby boy ... in a hut, in the jungle, on a mountain!”

Young Nurses Take Action is an Edmonton-based group of young UNA members who take part in charitable work abroad from time to time. Floating Doctors (floatingdoctors.com) is a Panama-based seafaring medical charity that brings free health care to people in remote coastal regions of the Caribbean. 🍷

UNA and health minister exchange frank views at January meeting

DESPITE concerns about low oil prices and a determination not to increase taxes, the Alberta Government does not intend to freeze public sector wages or roll back collective agreements, Health Minister Stephen Mandel told a delegation from United Nurses of Alberta on January 13.

UNA President Heather Smith, First Vice-President Jane Sustrik and Labour Relations Director David Harrigan met the health minister at his request “to discuss Alberta’s financial health.”

While the meeting turned out to be short on discussion of Alberta’s finances, Smith said, some important messages were nevertheless conveyed.

In addition to promising there would be no wage freeze for UNA members, Mandel said the care of Albertans will not be tied to the economy of the province, Smith said.

In addition, she said, “he told us he is looking to us and other health care unions to give him a hand.”

Mandel asked the UNA representatives: “What changes might we recommend? What opportunities are there to streamline and increase efficiency?”

“We encouraged the government to see this as an opportunity to undertake needed infrastructure repair.”

– Heather Smith

For the union’s part, Smith said, “we had many issues to raise as well.” UNA’s key points, she said, were:

- Support for progressive income and corporate taxes to ensure long-term sustainability of health care

- Support for modest deficits during downturns – “we encouraged the government to see this as an opportunity to undertake needed infrastructure repair”
 - Concern, despite Mandel’s pledge not to cut nursing numbers “that the government and AHS might undertake covert cuts to staffing and other budget lines, creating increased jeopardy for patients and staff”
 - UNA’s interest in the creation of a new AHS Governing Board
 - Demand the minister address violations of the Nursing Home Act, as some nursing homes are not ensuring 24-hour RN coverage as required by the law
- “We intend to be very assertive in responding to the Government’s desire to receive input from the public and public sector unions,” Smith concluded. 🍷

RN prescribing update

AUTHORIZING RN Prescribing is one of the amendments proposed to the Registered Nurses Profession Regulation by the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta. While CARNA is still waiting for the next draft of the Registered Nurses Profession Regulation from Alberta Health, some steps have been taken to prepare for the changes.

CARNA’s Provincial Council has approved in principle the RN Prescribing and Ordering of Diagnostic Tests Requirements and Standards, and the RN Competencies for Prescribing and Ordering Diagnostic Tests. Approval of these documents in principle will let CARNA move forward in the development of requirements and approval processes for RN prescribing education and CARNA operational processes.

Professional Associations
UPDATE
from CARNA

As RN prescribing moves ahead, an advisory committee to work with CARNA will be initiated. The committee will require key stakeholders to provide the necessary expertise to assist CARNA in this development work. Keep an eye on CARNA’s website for updates.

Thanks for participating!

Thanks to all who participated in Uniquely RN through November, December and January. Over 2,500 CARNA members participated in the face-to-face and online consultations. We are now looking at all the input, drafting reports, and considering next steps. 🍷



IMPORTANT QUESTION: What does your local know about security?

By Dewey Funk, UNA Labour Relations Officer, OH&S

UNA Professional Responsibility Advisor Chris Axtell and I attended District meetings in October to talk to Local Representatives about their knowledge of security procedures provided by their employer.

Our presentation covered both patient and occupational perspectives.

Important questions that need to be answered include: How can nurses provide safe patient care if they are afraid of being verbally or physically assaulted? Who is responsible for providing a safe work environment?

As a result, a survey has been sent out to UNA Local Executives. The questions on the survey ask how Nurses who work for Alberta Health Services report and deal with violence directed at health care providers.

For example, do you, as nurses, know the difference between a “Security Watch” and a “Constant Watch”? Most respondents did not know the difference between these terms used by AHS and nurses at

some rural sites had not even heard of them.

Nurses were asked if they thought Security Watch or Constant Watch could intervene during a violent incident. Respondents did not know. Most also indicated nurses had not seen security job descriptions and therefore could not know the correct response. It appears many nurses have been told by Security Watch and Constant Watch employees that they may not touch patients.

This raises the obvious question: In a crisis, who can?

Preliminary results of the survey also suggest RCMP personnel have told some health care sites the RCMP are not a security service. In addition, RCMP in some locations cannot attend sites for a considerable amount of time or not at all if they are attending to other duties.

As a result, many nurses are left to cope with violent emergencies as best they can. This is not acceptable.

The survey also asks how incidents of violence are recorded. Most responses indicate reporting takes place on the RLS system. However, Workplace Health and Safety and Protective Services have both indicated to me that they do not have access to RLS! Site managers have access, but are not forwarding reports unless the site manager deems the report worthy.

So a natural concern is how many cases of violence have been buried in RLS with the relevant departments not knowing? AHS has indicated the reporting process will change, but not what nurses should do until that happens.

Violence isn't going away. If anything, incidents seem to be on the rise.

I will be attending the next round of UNA District Meetings to report the findings of the survey. There will probably be another survey done at these meetings to give UNA a clearer picture of what you as nurses deal with so that solutions can be found. 🍷

In a crisis, **WHO CAN?**

Who is responsible
for providing a
**SAFE WORK
ENVIRONMENT?**

How can nurses provide
safe patient care if they are
**AFRAID OF BEING
ASSAULTED?**
verbally or physically



Edmonton Ironworkers protest loss of arena jobs to U.S. TFWs

WITH support from members of United Nurses of Alberta and other unions, Edmonton Ironworkers passed over for jobs on the city's new arena took their protests to the street in front of the huge jobsite on January 15.

Instead of hiring some of the 300 qualified ironworkers who are on the jobs list at the hiring hall a few blocks from the arena's location, the company that was awarded the lucrative contract for the construction of the \$480-million arena applied for and was granted federal approval to hire Temporary Foreign Workers for the job.

Some of the more than 300 Ironworkers and their supporters protesting at 104th Street and 104th Avenue in Edmonton carried signs reading "Built for Edmonton, Built By Edmonton," and "Where's The Home-Ice Advantage?"

"Denying an application to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program should have been an easy call when there are 300 workers qualified and ready to do the work just blocks away," Alberta Federation of Labour president Gil McGowan told the crowd. "It should have been an easy stop. Have the TFWP regulators pulled their goalie?"

Since the contract was awarded, and the applications were submitted, Ironworkers Local 720 has lobbied the city, the contractor and the federal government asking for jobs to be made available to qualified Canadian workers and for the

Temporary Foreign Worker Program permits to be revoked. Their requests have been rebuffed.

"In 30 years, local workers who had a part in it will point to it and tell their kids, 'I built that,'" Ironworkers Local 720 business agent George Papineau said. "We have literally hundreds of qualified tradespeople who are eager to do this job."

Most of them are Edmontonians, he added, "the sort of folks who haven't given up on the Oilers season yet – which is why it's so galling that the company building the new home of the Oilers has turned its back on them."

Construction on Rogers Place – set to become the new home of the

Edmonton Oilers in 2016 – began in March 2014. The 20,000-seat venue will require hundreds of thousands of man-hours to complete. Since the project was first proposed, it has been plagued by concerns that the economic benefits would not go to residents of the city.

Bruce Fafard, president of the Edmonton & District Labour Council, asked: "Is it good for the city for our tax dollars to go to American workers with no investment in the community? ... The arena is being paid for by tax dollars, and most citizens would rather see their tax dollars going to their neighbours than being sent out of the province and out of the country." 🇨🇦



Alberta Federation of Labour President Gil McGowan addresses protesters at a January 15 demonstration against the use of temporary foreign workers from the United States by a contractors on construction of the Oilers' new arena in Edmonton.

Vaccination controversies in media flip from flu to measles

WITH flu season advancing and embarrassment over the relative ineffectiveness of the 2014-15 vaccine against some strains of influenza, pressure for mandatory vaccination programs for health care workers seems to have receded for the moment in Alberta.

But UNA members should expect the call to return next year and in the future.

In the mean time, however, immunization and vaccines remained in the news – with the emphasis switching to public attitudes about measles vaccines in particular, amid reports of parent resistance to vaccinating their children for fear of negative impact and outbreaks of measles reported in California as well as Toronto and Montreal.

In Alberta, while Alberta Health Services reported no confirmed cases of the highly infectious and potentially deadly disease so far in 2015, there were 29 last year and 43 in 2013.

AHS officials sent a letter to parents in February urging them to inoculate their kids against the sickness, especially if they have plans of heading to southern California this spring.

Meanwhile, controversy erupted in Alberta over a public opinion poll that indicated as many as one in five Albertans believe debunked stories that the measles, mumps, rubella vaccine can spur autism.

Attitudes were similar in Ontario, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, with more than 20 per cent of respondents believing there is a correlation between vaccines and autism, a neurological disorder, prompting frustration from health authorities.

The same attitudes have led to falling immunization rates throughout the United States.

The National Post newspaper even reported a day care centre in Ottawa that offers a “vaccine-free environment” for kids. 🐶



CFNU Biennial set for Halifax in 2015



THE Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions will hold its 2015 Biennial Convention from June 1 to 5 in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Hosted by the Nova Scotia Nurses' Union, CFNU expects to welcome more than 1,000 nurses and delegates to weeklong event, which will feature guest speakers and educational workshops.

The theme of the 2015 convention is “We’ve got the power. Making a difference.”

Conference details and registration information can be found at: tinyurl.com/CFNUBiennium 🐶

Why health care needs to be a federal election issue

By Anil Naidoo, Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions

WE are only months away from a federal election and if nothing changes we will be looking at a referendum on Stephen Harper's almost 10 years in power.

The Conservatives will be talking about the need for stability in the economy and continuing the ongoing fight against terrorism, at home and abroad. The Opposition will be hoping that Canadians have tired of the scandals surrounding this government and that a fundamentally unlikeable prime minister will push Canadians to choose a different political brand.

If this is the focus of the election, it will be a sad day for Canadian health care. Talking about scandals or terrorism or even the economy lacks substance. Yes, accountability, security and jobs are all critical discussions, but politics easily becomes about vague platitudes and broad untestable assertions wrapped in empty promises. Philosophical arguments about "being tough on crime" or "small government" ultimately have no real impact in Canadian communities or homes. They just serve to make us more afraid and manage our expectations of the possible.


We really need to be discussing solutions to challenges that matter to Canadians. We should be using this election to look forward to outline a vision of where we want to go as a society and how to overcome obstacles that are holding us back. The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions has long been putting out clear solutions to critical issues. Look at CFNU's "Roadmap for a Rational Pharmacare Policy in Canada" and

you will find clear recommendations to move us forward, saving as much as \$11 billion annually in the process.

When the Ebola crisis hit North America, CFNU pressed the federal government to act but also made it very clear what needed to happen to protect front line health care workers and patients – advocating for proper protective gear, training and staffing.

The point is that democracy and elections are not just about the act of voting. Dropping voting rates are a problem, especially among younger Canadians, but the solution is not to say you should vote, or even to say vote for this party or that leader. It is more effective to show people that their engagement can make a difference and that voting and elections matter. Canadians know that how they vote will directly impact their access to quality health care. Who gets elected will decide what opportunities exist for our children. Which party wins will decide if seniors' issues and an aging population are addressed or ignored.

CFNU President, Linda Silas wrote in a recent article that "nurses, like other Canadians, will be paying special attention to the upcoming federal election. Nursing is a highly demanding job, and we are constantly trying to give our patients the best possible care. Unfortunately, we are finding this increasingly difficult because of federal, provincial and local health care cuts. Nurses need to recognize how politics and elections impact the care we provide."

Let's work together! 



Alberta Nursing students awarded UNA scholarships

UNITED Nurses of Alberta is proud to award scholarships to ten Nursing students in 2015. UNA's Nursing Education Scholarships and the Canadian Federation of Nurses Union Scholarship are awarded annually to assist Nursing students in studies in approved Nursing programs at Alberta's post-secondary institutions.

Jean Iwaasa, a Nursing student at the University of Lethbridge was awarded the annual CFNU Scholarship.



Second Vice-President Daphne Wallace, CFNU scholarship recipient Jean Iwaasa and Secretary-Treasurer Karen Craik.



Kaitlyn Venneman (middle), a Nursing student at Red Deer College, received a UNA Scholarship and was nominated by her mother, Heather Venneman (right), who is the President of UNA Local 43 (Olds Health Centre). They were joined at the reception by their grandmother and mother, Sheila Fritz (left), a retired nurse.



Second Vice-President Daphne Wallace, scholarship recipient Amber Bauer, President Heather Smith and First Vice-President Jane Sustrik.

Apply for a 2016 Nursing Education Scholarship

Completed applications must be received at the UNA Provincial Office delivered by postal mail or by hand no later than 4:30 pm, October 15, 2015. Digital or faxed applications will not be accepted. The awards will be announced in late January or early February of 2016.

Visit una.ab.ca for more information.



Elizabeth Swobda (left), a Nursing student at the University of Alberta, sponsored by her brother, Nicholas Swoboda (right), a member of UNA Local 301 (University of Alberta Hospital).




Daphne Wallace, recipient Morgan Hughes and Karen Craik.



Daphne Wallace, Local 196 member Galina Urban, scholarship recipient Michael Urban, Heather Smith and Jane Sustrik.

The following Nursing students received UNA scholarships:

- Amber Bauer
(Grant MacEwan University)
- Sydney Giebelhaus
(Grant MacEwan University)
- Morgan Hughes
(University of Calgary)
- Nadine Kennedy
(University of Alberta)
- Madison Penman
(University of Alberta)
- Elizabeth Swobod
(University of Alberta)
- Angela Thiessen
(University of Alberta)
- Sarah Tougas
(Grant MacEwan University)
- Michael Urban
(Grant MacEwan University)
- Kaitlyn Venneman
(Red Deer College)

Applicants must be related to a UNA member in good standing, complete an application form and write a short essay responding to the question “How does United Nurses of Alberta advocate for Members?” 



Scholarship recipient Angela Thiessen and Heather Smith

Government needs to patch holes in revenue system, not cut public services: **Better Way Campaign**

from the Alberta Federation of Labour

ALBERTA Premier Jim Prentice has proposed devastating cuts to the province's public services, but there is a "Better Way."

Over the next few weeks, voters will be hearing from the Better Way Alberta Campaign, showing them that there are sensible, moderate measures to help ensure the long-term financial stability of the province.

"Premier Jim Prentice has said that Alberta's budget is sinking, but if that's true, it's because his party has spent decades blowing holes in the revenue system that's supposed to pay for the services on which Albertans rely," Alberta Federation of Labour President Gil McGowan said.

"Instead of dealing with the problem, the premier has proposed a reckless 9-per-cent budget cut across the board," he said. "That will cause pain to everyday Albertans, put people out of work, and possibly deepen the economic turmoil the province is facing. There is a better way."

Found at www.betterwayalberta.ca, the campaign will give Albertans an opportunity to learn about the ways the provincial government's fiscal policies have given away billions of dollars to big corporations and to wealthy individuals. Animated videos promoted on social media and paid online advertising will drive traffic to the site, McGowan said.



An illustration from the "Better Way" campaign

"The premier is trying to blame the looming deficit on nurses, teachers, janitors, secretaries, the people who work for the citizens of the province." He said. "The truth is Alberta is in the middle of the pack when it comes to how much it spends on public services. We spend a little more per person than Nova Scotia ... and a little less than New Brunswick."

Canvassers will go door-to-door in key areas of the province during the campaign, asking Albertans to sign a petition urging for the government to fix the province's tax and royalty system. There will also be direct mail informing Albertans

about the petition and urging them to make revenue and public services the key issue in the upcoming provincial election.

"Poll after poll has shown Albertans are willing to have an adult conversation about revenues," McGowan said. "But successive premiers have done nothing but cut.

"Prentice has said he's willing to 'talk,' but so far that talk is just him ruling out one source of revenue after another. He's said 'no' to fair royalties, he's said 'no' to corporate taxes."

According to the government's own numbers, Alberta could increase the amount it gets from taxes by \$11 billion a year and still have the lowest taxes in Canada. Most of that \$11 billion is left in the pockets of Alberta's richest individuals and profitable corporations by a tax code designed to help the wealthy.

Asked McGowan: "If we're all in this together, as Premier Prentice says, why should corporations and the wealthy get a free pass?"

If the Prentice Government imposes the 9-per-cent cut, Alberta will end up spending less on public services than much poorer provinces, even as its population continues to boom. Albertans will have to deal with larger class sizes, more over-crowding in hospitals and longer waits for new infrastructure. Economists also agree that government cuts could tip the economy into recession. 🍷

Know *your* Rights

Report from Director of Labour Relations **David Harrigan**



Employees are entitled to at least 3 PD days a year under provincial contract

UNDER Article 35 of the UNA Provincial Collective Agreement ratified in 2014, full-time, part-time and casual employees are all entitled to three paid Personal Development days annually from April 1 to March 31.

Article 35.03 states: “Upon request, each Employee shall be granted at least three days annually for professional development, at the Basic Rate of Pay.”

These days are for the purpose of attending educational opportunities appropriate to members’ nursing practice, and if they are related to nursing can be used for whatever the member wishes.

In the words of Article 35.01, “the term ‘professional development’ includes orientation, acquisition and maintenance of essential skills and other programs which may be offered or approved by the Employer.” This could include studying in a library to study for professional colleges’ continuing requirements. However, PD days may not be used for vacation purposes.

The mention of three days in the collective agreement does not mean members may not request more than three PD days, or that the employer may not require an employee’s attendance at more than three.

Important additional points for members to consider include:

- Article 35.03, which also states, “an Employee shall be advised, prior to taking any professional

development days of any transportation, registration fees and other expenses that will be paid by the Employer.” This means the employer is not required to pay fees for PD days members have requested, but members are advised to ask if the employer will.

- Article 35.03 also states: “Such hours used in each fiscal year shall not be carried forward into subsequent years.” Accordingly, members are advised to use each year’s allotment of three PD days.
- Article 35.03 finally states: “Applications for such paid professional development opportunities shall be made in writing, to the Employer as early as possible.” Members are advised to take seriously the requirement for requesting PD days early, so that the employer has the opportunity to find replacements for the member’s shifts.

The employer is expected to make a reasonable attempt to find a replacement when a request is made under Article 35. If they have made an honest attempt to find a replacement, cannot do so and the loss of the employee from a shift would leave the unit in a dangerous situation, the employer can be expected to deny the leave. This is another reason for making requests as soon as possible.

Under Article 35.02, employees required to attend a compulsory in-service session on any day they are not scheduled to work must be paid at the overtime rate of 2X their regular salary. 🍷

Safe workplaces today
determine our health tomorrow



Day of Mourning April 28

