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March 24, 2020

The Hon. Tyler Shandro
Minister of Health of Alberta
By email: health.minister@gov.ab.ca

Subject: CFNU's Updated COVID-19 Position Statement: Health Care Workers Need Your Leadership

Dear Minister Shandro:

The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions and United Nurses of Alberta stand shoulder to shoulder with other labour organizations in calling for your government to empower health care workers and protect them as they face an unprecedented global public health crisis.

We have repeatedly called for governments at the federal and provincial/territorial levels to adopt the precautionary principle as their standard in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet in hospitals and long-term care facilities all across Canada inconsistencies in the rules around infection prevention and control and the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) still persist. Health care workers need your leadership at this time, Minister Shandro.

The CFNU's position and that of Canada's other health care labour unions is firmly based on the precautionary principle – that is, until we know all the facts about COVID-19, we should err on the side of caution. Ours is a sound approach both in terms of science and safety, and it accurately reflects the realities of working in health care facilities.

At any other time, nurses and other workers in health care environments are entrusted with the care of patients – yet at this critical moment, when faced with a global pandemic and when we need their skills and services most, they find their professional judgment called into question and their safety potentially jeopardized, which is both offensive and dangerous.

The CFNU and UNA believe that both health care workers and the Canadian public are better served by collaborating with decision-makers on sensible solutions like the ones we have proposed.

Canada must learn from the difficult lessons of other countries grappling with COVID-19. Health care workers make up nearly 10% of those infected in Italy, and close to 14% of COVID-19 cases in Spain. Here at home – for example, in Ontario – we've seen nurses, physicians and other health care workers exposed, some of whom have tested positive for coronavirus disease and are now observing 14 days of self-isolation at home.

Our position statement, enclosed herein, provides useful recommendations that could be put into practice immediately to protect workers in health care settings.

We reiterate our readiness and commitment to work with your government in good faith so that health care workers can focus on their duties of care to our communities.

Sincerely,

Linda Silas, President
Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions

Heather Smith, President
United Nurses of Alberta