

# HISTORY OF NURSING AND NURSES UNIONS IN ALBERTA

At the start of the 20th Century, the modern nursing profession was in its infancy. In Alberta, most hospital nurses were volunteer members of religious orders. The evolution of nurses into employees, trade unionists, and advocates for their profession, co-workers, and patients was mostly yet to come.

**1925**

AARN adopts a standard 12-hour period of duty, down from 24 hours.

**1916**

The Alberta Association of Graduate Nurses, later known as the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses (AARN), is created to control standards of training and nursing practice.

**1930s**

During the Great Depression, hospital employment of nurses through a legal employee-employer relationship becomes more common.

**1944**

Canadian Nurses Association endorses the right of nurses to bargain collectively with professional associations as bargaining agents.

**1950**

Staff nurse associations appear in Alberta hospitals; typical pay is \$8 per day.

**1980**

6,400 UNA nurses strike at 79 hospitals, demanding a 33.3% wage increase in one year; ordered back to work, they ignore the order; while in court arguing against the validity of the order, UNA reaches a settlement with 39.8% wage increase over two years; PRC process added to contract; after the strike, a starting general nurse is paid \$12.11 per hour.

**1982**

6,000 UNA nurses strike at 69 hospitals; the Legislature orders them back to work. The dispute is settled in arbitration. More than 300 nurses are locked out at Alberta health units before a negotiated settlement is reached that includes a 14% pay increase over one year.

**1984**

The Legislature bans strikes by all hospital workers, instead providing compulsory arbitration to settle disputes not resolved in collective bargaining.

**1985**

Health unit nurses strike legally for 10 months.

**1988**

Employers demand massive rollbacks; 14,000 UNA nurses at 98 hospitals strike illegally for 19 days; individual nurses are served with civil contempt charges, and UNA pays \$426,750 in fines; Heather Smith is elected president.

**1965**

After a struggle with several hospital boards, AARN becomes officially involved in collective bargaining on behalf of members.

**1961**

About 60% of Alberta's nurses are employees, paid \$285 per month; Social Credit government freezes nurse wages for three years; AARN agrees in return for the promise of a pension.

**1977**

AARN votes to let its collective bargaining arm become a separate organization; United Nurses of Alberta is founded on May 6; UNA begins a legal strike of 2,500 nurses at seven hospitals and, when ordered back to work a judge awards them a 9% salary increase; a new staff nurse is paid \$6.28 per hour.

**1973**

The Supreme Court of Canada rules nurses may establish unions independent of professional associations; Calgary public health nurses strike for a week.

**1972**

AARN abandons its no-strike policy.

**1966**

New Alberta legislation permits full unionization of nurses.

**1978**

UNA holds its first AGM.

**1990**

UNA reaps the benefits of the 1988 strike in negotiations with an average 27% pay increase and other improvements.

**1997**

UNA and the Staff Nurses Associations of Alberta form a single province-wide nurses' union; a first-year RN is paid \$18.34 per hour.

**1996**

Klein cuts cause the number of Registered Nurses working in Alberta to drop by more than 3,000; UNA creates a PRC database.

**1995**

Alberta creates regional health authorities.

**1994**

After a Reporting Meeting and vote, UNA members accept the 5% rollbacks demanded by the Klein Government.

**1993**

UNA charges Premier Ralph Klein and other senior elected officials and employer associations with threatening an illegal lockout to support their demand for a 5% wage rollback.

**2001**

Almost all of UNA agreements are up for renegotiation; after agreements are reached, most starting RNs are paid \$21.54 per hour.

**2002**

Government reduces the number of health regions from 17 to 9.

**2003**

Province restructures health care labour relations, creating four consolidated bargaining units per health region; UNA becomes bargaining representative for all unionized hospital RNs and RPNs in Alberta.

**2009**

UNA and other health care unions successfully block AHS plan to close Alberta Hospital Edmonton and transfer psychiatric care "to the community."

**2008**

Legislature consolidates nine Alberta health regions into Alberta Health Services with four collective agreements; UNA represents RNs and RPNs.

**2005**

Premier Ralph Klein launches "the Third Way," an attempt to introduce widespread privatization to health care; it will be stopped a year later by public opposition led by health care unions.

**2013**

UNA members at Devonshire Care Centre in Edmonton, who had just joined UNA, strike for two weeks to win fair pay increases.

**2015**

In response to another UNA court challenge, the Alberta Court of Queen's bench rules the ban on strikes at public hospitals in Alberta is unconstitutional; in May, an NDP government is elected in Alberta that redrafts the law to allow strikes.

**2018**

UNA and major health employers agree to a new collective agreement, including a two-year wage freeze, but with many other improvements; a starting RN is paid \$36.86 per hour.

**2010**

A new UNA collective agreement is negotiated; a starting RN is paid \$32.34 per hour.

**2014**

UNA goes to court to challenge Premier Alison Redford's legislation violating health care workers' rights to freedom of expression and association as well as other fundamental freedoms. Before the case is complete, the Premier Jim Prentice withdraws the legislation.

**2017**

UNA, AHS, and Covenant Health reaffirm their commitment to the PRC process.

**2020**

World Health Organization declares COVID-19 to be a global pandemic on March 11.

**2022**

UNA members endorse a new Provincial Collective Agreement with Alberta Health Services, Covenant Health and other employers after more than two years of bargaining and mediation, through the pandemic. UNA nurses remain the best paid in Canada. A starting RN will be paid \$39.22/hr and the top rate will be \$52.49/hr when the agreement expires in 2024.