



UNA
United Nurses of Alberta

NEWS Bulletin

2024 Bargaining Update

PAGE 3

New LOU protects rights of employees impacted by creation of Recovery Alberta

PAGE 4



**SOLIDARITY
MEANS
STANDING
TOGETHER!**

UNA members in Camrose held an information walk during Nurses Week to raise awareness about the importance of safe staffing and safe patient care in their community.

Published by the United
Nurses of Alberta four times
a year for our members.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Nurses need hope, not more chaos – we may have to create it ourselves

■ **SUMMER** is here, but the blue skies and warm temperatures we are experiencing may be deceptive. There is a storm brewing.

At the end of May, negotiations dealing with the transfer of Alberta Health Services employees to Recovery Alberta successfully completed, we reached an agreement with AHS on a Letter of Understanding that provides very significant protections for our members.

This is a bright spot in a gloomy forecast.

As we got back to negotiating a new Provincial Collective Agreement with AHS and other health care employers, we recognized that health care in Alberta is going through a summer of chaos caused by the UCP government's decision to break up AHS into four separate agencies.

This makes the fight for a contract that UNA members can be proud of, and that will lead to a better, safer, more stable public health care system, all the more difficult in the face of a government that wants to put more public dollars into private hands.

This is a difficult time for the health care system and nurses. The uncertainty caused by the chaos and confusion is hindering the ability to retain RNs and RPNs, and to recruit new ones.

If we can't reach an agreement that addresses short staffing, mandatory overtime, and cancelled vacations that are now chronic, we can't get back to being a health care system that is a magnet for nurses from across the country.

We asked for significant pay increases because that's what our members need and deserve. It is also what the health care system requires to continue to operate – because you can't run a modern health care system, no matter how it is structured, without nurses.

That's why UNA isn't backing down. But it comes back to you, our members, to ensure we can achieve a contract that we can be proud of, that acknowledges the importance of the work we do, and how well we do it.

We may have to take tough action.

What happens next is not clear. We have no bargaining dates beyond the end of June.

If we can't reach an agreement this summer, the Negotiating Committee will apply for mediation and, if that does not succeed, we could be facing a labour dispute in the fall.

We must have hope that a deal can be reached and our health care system can be protected!

We're talking about the future of our jobs, our workplaces, our profession and our health care system.

The theme of this year's AGM is Imagine. Imagine working with a full staff compliant. Imagine no mandatory overtime. Imagine not having overcapacity bed and lower ER waits.

We must move from chaos to hope. We will have to fight to achieve that hope.

In Solidarity,

Heather Smith
President, United Nurses of Alberta

UNA negotiations make slow progress ahead of summer as mediator invited to assist discussions



■ **WITH** negotiations dealing with the transfer of Alberta Health Services employees to the new Recovery Alberta agency successfully completed, United Nurses of Alberta and AHS returned to bargaining a new Provincial Collective Agreement on June 5 and 6.

“The Negotiating Committee believes we have achieved very significant protection for our members with the Letter of Understanding about the transfer of employees to Recovery Alberta,” said UNA President Heather Smith.

“Now we are back to trying to get a collective agreement that our members can be proud of,” she said.

Because recently negotiation meetings have shown very little progress, UNA and the Employer have agreed to seek the assistance of a mediator.

Discussions about an overarching Essential Services Agreement with AHS were concluded and UNA expects to conclude a similar agreement with Covenant Health soon. UNA’s negotiations committee has asked the Employers to provide the Unit/Office staffing plans as soon as possible.

Smith characterized the negotiations for a new agreement as part of a difficult fight for “a better, safer, stable public health care system” that will continue into the fall, and beyond.

“This is a very difficult time for Alberta’s health care system, health

care workers, and in particular nurses,” Smith said.

At present, she said, Alberta is suffering through “a summer of chaos” caused by the United Conservative Government’s decision to break up Alberta Health Services into four separate agencies to oversee mental health and addictions, acute care, primary care, and continuing care.

The creation of Recovery Alberta – the addictions, mental health, and corrections agency – was the first. It is to be followed by the establishment of primary care and continuing care agencies. The fourth will be a much-diminished Alberta Health Services, probably renamed Alberta Hospital Services, providing acute care.

“We stood up and asked for significant pay increases because that is what our members need and deserve,” she said, adding that this is required for the health care system if anyone expects it to retain enough Registered Nurses and Registered Psychiatric Nurses to operate.

“We are not talking about backing down,” she warned. “We may have to take very tough action.”

If progress is not made in bargaining through the summer, Smith said, she expects negotiations to move into mediation quickly, with the potential for an impasse in the fall.

“We are not talking about backing down, we may have to take very tough action.”

– Heather Smith

□ CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



Explaining the transition
from AHS to Recovery
Alberta (FAQ)



Letter of Understanding



UNA Layoff & Recall FAQ



Employer/UNA
Joint Layoff & Recall
Statements

UNA provides new resources for members about Recovery Alberta, Layoff and Recall

UNA has prepared four new documents to help provide clarity for members affected by the transition of Employees from AHS to the new Recovery Alberta sector-based provincial health authority:

Explaining the transition from AHS to Recovery Alberta (FAQ): This frequently asked questions document answers some of the key questions that UNA members have about how their employment will be impacted if their positions are moved to the new sector-based provincial health authority responsible for mental health and addictions.

Letter of Understanding re: Transition of Employees pursuant to Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024: This LOU signed by UNA and Alberta Health Services retains and expands the rights of employees affected by the creation of Recovery

Alberta and other future Provincial Health Agencies.

UNA Layoff & Recall FAQ: This guide provides UNA members, locals, and staff with answers to the questions most frequently asked about layoff and position elimination.

Employer/UNA Joint Layoff & Recall Statements: This document is intended to be a resource document that guides Employer Human Resources and UNA Labour Relations Officers through the layoff and recall process. Where these joint statements contradict statements in the UNA Layoff and Recall Manual or the AHS Layoff and Recall Manual, this document takes precedence.

These documents are available at www.una.ca. Members with additional questions should contact their UNA Local Executive or Labour Relations Officer. 🍷

UNA believes new LOU will provide significant protections for RNs and RPNs impacted by creation of RECOVERY ALBERTA

■ **A NEW** Letter of Understanding signed by United Nurses of Alberta and Alberta Health Services retains and expands the rights of employees affected by the creation of Recovery Alberta and other future provincial health agencies.

The LOU covers Recovery Alberta and all additional health agencies the provincial government has signaled it intends to create under the recently passed Bill 22, *Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024*.

The UNA Negotiations Committee believes this LOU will provide significant employment protections for Registered Nurses and Registered Psychiatric Nurses impacted by the creation of Recovery Alberta and any future provincial health agencies.

The letter of understanding was bargained during five days of talks with AHS set aside to deal specifically with the rights of employees impacted by the creation of Recovery Alberta.

□ CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

Legislature passes bill to break AHS into four separate health care agencies

■ **THE** Alberta Legislature has passed a law to break Alberta Health Services into four separate organizations that the government says will oversee mental health and addictions, acute care, primary care, and continuing care.

Critics assailed the change as a precursor to widespread privatization in health care as the United Conservative Party Government moved ahead quickly with the creation of the addictions, mental health and corrections agency, to be called Recovery Alberta.

Each division is expected to have its own minister and parallel civil service bureaucracy, while the minister of health is designated the “oversight minister” of all four organizations.

Bill 22, the *Health Statutes Amendment Act*, sets out the governance structure of the four

organizations and created mechanisms by which the government could move employees to the new organizations.

About 10,000 employees are expected to be transferred from AHS to Recovery Alberta. UNA has negotiated a Letter of Understanding to protect the rights of members being moved to the new organization. [See Bargaining LOU on page 4]

UNA Director of Labour Relations David Harrigan warned in a CBC interview that upending the health care system would make it harder to recruit nurses to come to Alberta. “Alberta used to be the highest paid. We’re now about number four and they’re dissolving the system. I think it’s going to make it much more difficult to attract them,” Harrigan said. 🍷

About 10,000 employees are expected to be transferred from AHS to Recovery Alberta.

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Under the new LOU, employees will have the option to transfer to the new employer or to remain employed by AHS with full rights to displace or fill a vacant position under Article 15 of the Provincial Collective Agreement.

Indirectly affected employees displaced by affected employees will have full Article 15 rights, as well as the right to select a vacant position at Recovery Alberta.

All affected employees transferred from AHS to RA will initially be treated as a part of a single bargaining unit for the purpose of administering the current Provincial Collective Agreement. This situation will continue until April 2025.

A tiered system for hiring and downsizing will take effect in April 2025,

meaning that Recovery Alberta employees will no longer be treated as internal candidates when applying for vacant positions within AHS but will nevertheless be considered ahead of other external applicants not employed by a provincial health agency.

In the event of downsizing, Recovery Alberta employees will have the ability to displace other positions within Recovery Alberta or apply for vacant positions within AHS. If a Recovery Alberta employee is laid off, they can be recalled to AHS.

The LOU also applies to casual Employees who pick up additional shifts, and includes provisions for employees on leaves of absence, Workers’ Compensation, and disability. 🍷



UNA Letter to Health
Minister Adriana
LaGrange



Government of Alberta
News Release

UNA points out its concerns with false references to original AHS mandate

■ **ON** May 17, UNA expressed its concern about repeated mistaken references by government officials to the original mandate given Alberta Health Services.

In a letter to Health Minister Adriana LaGrange, UNA Labour Relations Director David Harrigan noted recent comments by the government that AHS was intended to focus only on the delivery of acute care services.

“This is mistaken,” Harrigan wrote, pointing to the Government of Alberta news release published on May 15, 2008.

That release stated: “The new governance model is intended to strengthen a provincial approach to managing health services, including surgical access, long-term care, chronic disease management and addictions and mental health services as well as health workforce and access to primary care.” 🍷

New Alberta regulations eliminate all nursing care requirements for residents of continuing care homes

■ **NEW** provincial continuing-care regulations that took effect on April 1 mean there is now no legal requirement to provide nursing care for residents living in Alberta continuing care facilities

The *Continuing Care Act* passed in May 2022 eliminated language from previous legislation that identified a minimum number of hours of nursing care that had to be provided to patients in continuing care. Some parts of the act have not yet been proclaimed into law.

The new *Continuing Care Regulation* also includes no mention of a minimum number of required hours of nursing care.

“So we are taking the care out of continuing care,” Heather Smith said at the time.

The previous legislation required continuing care home operators to provide 1.9 hours of nursing and personal care

per day, of which 22 per cent had to be provided by a Registered Nurse or Registered Psychiatric Nurse. While that was clearly inadequate, at least there was a minimum legal standard, Smith said.

The government has now completely eliminated that meagre requirement.

“We are moving to zero hours of care. This is extremely dangerous.”

Smith said UNA is also concerned the new regulations allow broad exemptions to the watered-down rules governing continuing care facility operations without public transparency or meaningful oversight.

The new regulations will allow operators to apply for exemptions behind closed doors, without input from stakeholders such as families, workers or unions. There is also no requirement for names of continuing care operators who apply for exemptions to be published anywhere. 🍷

The new Continuing Care Regulation also includes no mention of a minimum number of required hours of nursing care.

LOCALS GO ABOVE AND BEYOND to engage members during Nurses Week

■ **THIS** Nurses Week, UNA members across Alberta took time to gather, celebrate and thank their co-workers for the dedication and compassion that makes a difference in patients' lives every day. Nurses know health care works best when nurses work as a team and stick together.

Nurses know health care works best when nurses work as a team and stick together.

Nurses Week events ranged from coffee carts and cupcakes to thank you dinners and BBQs to an information

walk in Camrose and a well-attended mental health nurse appreciation event in Edmonton.

It was thrilling to see so many UNA locals and members share photos from their Nurses Week gatherings on social media.

A record number of UNA Locals submitted their Nurses Week outreach material for this year's Nurses Week Member Engagement Challenge. The winners of this week's challenge will be announced in the coming months. UNA thanks all the locals who worked so hard to find new and exciting ways to engage their members during this year's Nurses Week. 🇺🇸

United Nurses of Alberta members celebrated Nurses Week at events across the province



NURSES WEEK PROVIDED AN OPPORTUNITY FOR UNA MEMBERS TO MAKE NEWS

■ UNA members whose Nurses Week comments and commentary made news in May included the author of an opinion piece that argued the key to a health care system that works is respect for nurses, a rural nurse interviewed about her experience as a nurse educator, and another who argued in a letter to the editor that nurses' wages and working conditions need to improve.



St. Albert Gazette article



Cheryl Taylor
Letter to the Editor



Celebrating National
Nursing Week from May
6-12 - Westlock News

On May 11, Local 85 President Orissa Shima's Nurses Week opinion-editorial published by the *St. Albert Gazette* told readers in the medium-sized city northwest of Edmonton that "pizza and prizes are nice, but what nurses at the Sturgeon Community Hospital really want for Nurses Week is a fair collective agreement."

A copy of Shima's article is reproduced in this edition of UNA NewsBulletin on pages 9 and 10. You can also read it on the Gazette website.

On May 7, *Westlock News* reporter Kevin Berger profiled nurses in the

community northwest of Edmonton, including Local 73 President Rachael Schiller.

"That personal connection that rural health care offers is why I continue to be a nurse in the rural area," Schiller told the reporter.

The same day, Local 58 President Cheryl Taylor's Nurses Week letter to the editor was published by *The Capital* in Three Hills, located about 130 kilometres northeast of Calgary.

Alberta must recognize, she wrote, that it needs "to become a place that attracts more nurses by offering better working conditions with competitive wages that keep with the pace of inflation and safe nurse-patient ratios because it has a direct effect on you, your family and members within the community when seeking medical help."

Nurses Week is marked each year in the week that includes May 12, the birth date of pioneering nurse Florence Nightingale. 🍷

More than 150 UNA members attended a Mental Health Nurses event hosted by UNA Local 183 and the Mental Health Caucus during Nurses Week.



RESPECTING NURSES

is the key to a health care system that runs as it should

By Orissa Shima
President, UNA Local 85
Sturgeon Community Hospital

The following story appeared in the *St. Albert Gazette* on May 11, 2024.

■ **NURSES** at the Sturgeon Community Hospital in St. Albert are no longer immune to the conditions that have afflicted rural and larger sites for years.

As National Nurses Week 2024 approaches, hallway nursing is an everyday occurrence at the Sturgeon, as is chronic overcapacity, even in our neonatal intensive care unit.

Nurses in St. Albert can no longer offer the care they were trained to provide. Most leave at the end of their shift feeling distressed about all the care they couldn't provide. Many feel burnt out and some are so frustrated they are driven away from our hospital, or out of the nursing profession altogether.

This year, Nurses Week runs from May 6 to 12. Nurses Week is a chance to celebrate the contributions made by nurses and the nursing profession to the well-being of all Canadians.

At the Sturgeon Community Hospital, members of the United Nurses of

Alberta will celebrate the 550 nurses of our local on May 14.

Our celebrations are delayed because our union will be bargaining during Nurses Week. On May 7, the union bargaining team was at the labour board to address a bad faith bargaining complaint filed by our union against Alberta Health Services.

It is fitting to celebrate Nurses Week a bit late because nursing is a 24/7 profession. Nurses are used to celebrating when they can, given the nature of shift work. They celebrate holidays and birthdays with their families when they can get the time off, and Nurses Week is no different.

We will celebrate with a pizza party and prizes for the nurses. We will gather at lunch on the day shift and have food delivered to the nurses working evenings and nights. We won't leave out any shift.

UNA members from Camrose and area marked Nurses Week with an information walk in support of safe staffing and safe patient care.

□ CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



□ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

Pizza and prizes are nice, but what nurses really want for Nurses Week is a fair collective agreement.

Above all, the Sturgeon's nurses want respect and safe staffing.

Respect means paying nurses what they are worth. Safe staffing means investments must be made that will put more nurses on the front lines.

Safe staffing means having enough nurses looking after patients to ensure they are safe.

But in addition to facing short staffing, mandatory overtime, and very little time off, nurses in Alberta are no longer compensated as well as nurses in other provinces like British Columbia and Ontario. It will take a good compensation package to recruit and retain nurses in this province as we compete for talent in the midst of a global nursing shortage.

The current government doesn't seem to understand health care (as

evidenced by their dismantling of AHS), but they do understand supply and demand. The demand for nurses is high and the supply is limited.

This Nurses Week, don't worry about the pizza party. We've got that covered.

If you really want to really show your appreciation for nurses, please tell AHS to bargain in good faith, and the government of Alberta to continue to invest in public health care.

Tell the government that nurses must be compensated fairly and reckless restructuring must stop.

What nurses really need is a government focused on respecting nurses, retaining the ones we have, and recruiting more nurses to Alberta.

If they focus on these three things, nurses in Alberta can get back to doing what they do best. Providing high quality, compassionate, safe care to Albertans. 🍷



View recorded event
on UNA Forums

■ ABOUT 750 UNA members took part in the union's seventh Wellness Day event on May 9, 2024.

With the theme of "Sleep Smarter, Save Savvier: Strategies for Sleep and Financial Wellness," the all-day online event focused on financial health and sleep.

The Zoom webinar included strategies to sleep smarter, led by Dr. Geoffrey Soloway,

the founder and chief training officer of MindWell-U; financial wellness breakout sessions; and Breathwork for Mindfulness Practice with Dr. Soloway.

"UNA is proud to put on these Wellness Day events to support the physical, psychological, and financial wellbeing of our members," said Second Vice President Cam Westhead, who thanked the presenters, UNA's Membership Committee and staff who helped plan this engaging session.

Members who were unable to attend the event live can still view a recorded version on UNA Forums.

UNA members planning to attend future Wellness Days are encouraged to ask for a Professional Development Day from their employers. 🍷

BERYL SCOTT

was a UNA leader and tireless fighter for human rights

JAN. 7, 1947- MARCH 19, 2024



■ **BERYL** Scott – a fierce and tireless union and human rights activist – was born in Jamaica in 1947, studied nursing and midwifery in England in the 1970s, and came to Canada soon after, where her brother had already started a new life in Ontario.

Beryl died on March 19, 2024, in Edmonton. She was 77.

Always forceful, Beryl recalled in an Alberta Labour History Institute interview how she visited Canada House in London, found a Canadian nursing job in Hamilton, and decided to make the move soon after. “I finished work at midnight in England, caught the flight out the next morning at 10, and I started work in Ontario the very next day!”

“Beryl was my first local president when I came to Alberta,” recalled United Nurses of Alberta President Heather Smith. “She did important work with the North Central District, including serving as vice-chair, and with Alberta Federation of Labour committees. Her mission was diversity

and fairness and she changed UNA for the better.”

“Beryl advocated tirelessly for marginalized groups in Canadian society,” Smith continued. “At UNA and the AFL, she played a key role in organizing caucuses for workers of colour and Indigenous workers. She served on the UNA Executive Board for many years while also remaining active in Local 79.”

Siobhan Vipond, executive vice-president of the Canadian Labour Congress, remembered “the honour of working with Beryl, especially in relation to her multicultural work. She had a passion and great skill to bring all types of people together for the greater good. She will truly be missed.”

Friend and colleague Gloria McFarlane also recalled Beryl’s multicultural work. “She always had something wise to pass on, but also gave us historical context on her life as a nurse in England and Canada – the struggles and successes of a single black woman transplanted into a different culture and community.” □ CONTINUED ON PAGE 13

Lt. Governor Norman Kwong and his wife Mary Kwong with Beryl Scott and Heather Smith at the 2010 Free Yourself Dinner Gala put on by the Centre for Race and Culture.

“Her mission was diversity and fairness and she changed UNA for the better.”

– Heather Smith



A LIFETIME OF SERVICE: Alberta nurse, 90, remains on duty after 57 years

By Camelia Guthrie

UNA Communications Advisor

■ **MEET** Hyacinthe Al-Hassan, a nurse whose remarkable journey spans an astonishing 57 years of service to others.

At the age of 90, Al-Hassan continues to work casual shifts as a Registered Psychiatric Nurse at the University of Alberta Hospital – where she has worked for the past 45 years of her life.

“I’m not working as regularly as I did in the past,” she said. “Now I do a week-end on and off, but I am still going.”

Her path to nursing started in the United Kingdom and was paved by the inspiring women in her family who dedicated themselves to the profession.

Initially aspiring to become a doctor, her journey took a turn when she realized her true calling was in nursing. Despite spending a year in medical school, her heart led her back to nursing, a decision she has never regretted.

“I enjoyed it. I love it to this day, and I am happy that I became a nurse,” she says.

“They need to let the nurses know they care. If they don’t address it nurses are not going to stay in the profession.”

– Hyacinthe Al-Hassan

Asked about some of her most cherished memories of her decades-long career, she says it was being part of a team performing brain surgery.

Reflecting on the changes she has witnessed in nursing over the years, Al-Hassan pointed to the diminishing time nurses get to spend with their patients as among the biggest challenges. She advocates for more practical hours to be included nursing training programs and more support for nurses.

“There will always be a shortage of nurses,” she said. “They need to let the nurses know they care. If they don’t address it nurses are not going to stay in the profession.”

Al-Hassan’s commitment to her profession remains steadfast.

Her advice to young nurses echoes her years of experience: nursing must stem from a place of love and dedication. “Always remember your patient concerns are your concerns and let them feel confident that they’ll be taken care of.”

Beyond her professional life, Al-Hassan prioritizes her physical and mental well-being through simple joys. Gardening, shopping, and staying active keep her spirits high and her mind sharp. 🌸



“Her fight for the BIPOC community is what drew me to her,” McFarlane said, marvelling at Beryl’s capacity for volunteer activities. “She was an energetic leader, mentor and friend.”

Said Judy Moar, who worked with Beryl on the North Central District and AFL: “I have known Beryl for nearly 30 years. She was my teacher and mentor, as she was to many. Beryl was passionate and worked tirelessly with worker rights, collective bargaining, human rights and multiculturalism, and many more causes. I was fortunate to have been her friend.”

Daphne Wallace, retired UNA second VP, remembered how Beryl was passionate about everything she did. “Beryl made her adopted country her home and the friends she made became part of her family. Whether you were a health care worker, an activist, the cab driver she used on a regular basis, or a member of her community, you were part of her family. She touched the hearts and lives of many and will be missed and remembered.”

In 1980, a year after arriving in Canada, Beryl moved to Alberta, taking a job at the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton. She was active in the union from Day 1. “My first day at the Royal Alex, they looked at me and said, ‘We’re looking for a ward rep.’ I said, ‘I’ve only just arrived here. You can’t ask me to be a ward rep.’ They said, ‘Well, we just heard you tell that doctor off, so we think you’ll be the perfect person to be a ward rep!’”

After a year at the Royal Alex, Beryl took a job with better shifts at the Edmonton General. And after a year at the General, she moved to the Grey Nuns Hospital in Edmonton, where she would remain until her retirement.

A week after arriving in Alberta, Beryl was involved in the strike that brought Professional Responsibility Concern language to the union’s contract. She

immediately put that contract language to use upon her return to the ward.

In addition to her trade union activities, Beryl advocated tirelessly for marginalized groups in Canadian society throughout her nursing career, volunteering for numerous civil society groups. At UNA and the AFL, she played a key role in organizing caucuses for workers of colour and Indigenous workers. She served on the UNA Executive Board for many years while also remaining active in Local 79.

Late in her life, experiencing health care as a patient and not a caregiver, Beryl warned that in some ways, the health care system in Alberta was getting even worse under premier Jason Kenney than when Ralph Klein was premier, closing a hospital and driving nurses out of the province.

Awards received by Beryl during her career included the 2009 AFL International Women’s Day Award, the 2016 Community Woman of the Year Award from Diversity Magazine, and 2018 Daughter of the Year Award from Canadians for a Civil Society.

Beryl requested that there be no memorial service, but there is a fundraising page to raise \$1,800 to plant a memorial tree in the city of Edmonton in her honour.

The page can be found at: <https://gofund.me/0b06815a> 🍷

A week after arriving in Alberta, Beryl was involved in the strike that brought Professional Responsibility Concern language to the union’s contract.



Memorial Tree fundraising page



RN volunteer missions to Latin America continue in 2024 with UNA help

■ **UNITED** Nurses of Alberta members are continuing volunteer medical missions to Latin America this year with support from their union.

Local 115 member Mina McCrea participated in a surgical mission to Guatemala in January and Local 1 member Lindiwe Mhlanga journeyed to Belize with a group of students from a Calgary religious school. The Alberta Registered Nurses were each supported by a \$1,000 International Solidarity grant from UNA.



Mina McCrea (second from right) with other OR nurses from Local 115 in front of the hospital in Guatemala.



photo from Lindiwe Mhlanga



photo from Lindiwe Mhlanga

McCrea, an OR nurse at the Foothills Medical Centre in Calgary, travelled to the community of Antigua, Guatemala, for two weeks with a surgical team made up of surgeons, nurses, anesthesiologists, audiologists, translators, and support staff.

In addition to five operating rooms, McCrea said in her report to UNA, the team also operated a hearing clinic where hearing tests are performed, and hearing aids were fitted and repaired. This year, the team completed 184 surgeries and served 139 patients in the hearing clinic.

“Patients come from very far away just to be seen in the clinic with the hopes of having surgery,” she wrote in her report. “We had some patients come from as far as Mexico.”



On every surgical day, each surgeon and their team performed between three to five cases, she reported. “Some examples of the most common surgeries performed are hysterectomies, removal of uterine fibroids, hernia repairs, cholecystectomies, septoplasties, and tonsillectomies.” Team RNs worked with nurses from the Hermano Pedro Hospital.

Mhlanga, who works in the vascular surgery unit at the Peter Lougheed Centre, helped escort 22 students from the Chinook Winds Adventist Academy to Ladyville, Belize, where they helped build an addition to the Ladyville Primary Adventist School.

Fortunately, she recalled, during the trip there were only a few cases of sunburn and the need to keep hydrated in the 35-degree heat, plus a few cuts and scrapes – “but nothing a little Polysporin and a Band-Aid couldn’t fix.” This was not McCrea’s first surgical mission to the region. “Every year I am left in awe of the Guatemalan people and how resilient they are,” she said. Many have struggled for years due to their conditions and travelled for hours to be seen in the clinic. Even though none of our patients spoke English and some only spoke indigenous Mayan languages, their gracious and kind nature was apparent.” 🍷



photo from Lindiwe Mhlanga



Lindiwe Mhlanga



28 PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY CONCERNS

bring change to Medicine Hat Regional Hospital

■ **PRE-EXISTING** vacancies, coupled with leaves and ongoing challenges with recruitment and retention, led to the filing of 28 Professional Responsibility Concerns at the 5 East Medical/Surgical unit at the Medicine Hat Regional Hospital.

The unit had been experiencing staffing issues since August 2023. The PRCs indicated unsafe staffing ratios, increased workload for RNs, charge nurse assignments on evenings and nights, inappropriate use of staff skill mix not meeting CoAct (Collaborative Care Team) requirements, and the continuous use of mandated overtime.

UNA discussed the matter at meetings of the joint Professional Responsibility Concern Committee (PRCC), but no resolutions were found. As a result, UNA requested data from the employer. The data indicated not only an increase in mandated overtime shifts to support unit staffing operational needs but also baseline staffing not being met and a correlating increase in nursing sick time.

Morale on the unit was low, there was an increase in burnout, and staffing turnover was high.

With Christmas and New Years approaching and many shifts remaining unfilled, UNA Local 70's Professional Responsibility Committee requested a meeting with Alberta Health Services senior leaders under article 36 of the Provincial Collective Agreement. Some of UNA's recommendations included adding a Health Care Aide to days and evenings to assist with workload, and an increase of Clinical

Nurse Educator (CNE) hours to support additional training and orientation of new staff and existing staff.

As a result, the employer committed to the following, which have been accepted by the Local.

- A vacancy report for RNs will be shared at the regular PRC committee meetings.
- Verbal handoffs at the end of every shift will be promoted, and this expectation will be included in the RN charge roles and responsibility document.
- Additional 1.4 FTE of HCA hours on a six-month temporary basis. The scheduled hours of the HCA will be discussed at the PRC committee meetings to ensure the best use of their support.
- Additional .50 FTE of CNE hours for a temporary six-month period. Their support will also be discussed at the PRC committee meetings.
- Support provided to RNs in charge to ensure CoAct is achieved.
- The AHS Talent Acquisition Team has begun the work of addressing morale issues on 5E and will share the information once completed.

Monitoring of these commitments are being reviewed and discussed at regular PRCC meetings. The outcome of these PRCs is a testament to the collaborative work the Professional Responsibility Concern process can achieve. The Local 70 PRCC thanks Local President Donna Bitz for her advocacy and input into this successful resolution. 🍷

The outcome of these PRCs is a testament to the collaborative work the Professional Responsibility Concern process can achieve.

New PRC workshop a success, members say

■ A WORKSHOP launched last fall by United Nurses of Alberta for nurses with all levels of experience with the Professional Responsibility Concern process is getting good reviews from the union's members.

The Intro to PRC Workshop, the first full-day PRC workshop for general members, is a landmark in UNA's commitment to safe, quality patient care.

Fifteen classes have been completed across the province since the workshop's inception in September, and demand for the course is high. Additional workshop dates will be added soon.

The workshop is designed to educate members on the intricacies of PRC, a documentation tool developed by the union for members to support their professional obligation as patient advocates. It covers every aspect of the PRC process, ensuring members are well-equipped to navigate the process confidently.

Using the PRC process, which is now entrenched in UNA's Provincial Collective Agreement and other contracts, members can influence and enhance professional standards and improve system-wide accountability. At the heart of the process is

the understanding patient safety is a fundamental aspect of all nursing decisions, and advocating for system changes is an integral component of the nursing profession.

The introductory workshop begins with initial identification of concerns and moves to the engagement with management by UNA Local representatives for resolution. It covers every critical aspect of the PRC process, ensuring members are well-equipped to navigate the process confidently and to advocate for patient safety and improved practice standards.

According to participant feedback, the practical guidance provided on using PRC resources and filling out the necessary documentation has been well received. In addition to supporting members as patient-safety advocates, the workshop facilitates the ongoing efforts of Local PRC committees.

A redesigned PRC Committee workshop launched in January also assists PRC committee members with varying levels of experience with reporting concerns and helps them improve their committees' efficiency and efficacy.

All available workshop dates are listed under the Events section of DMS. 🌸

By Tracee Cowan and Chris Axtell
UNA PRC Advisors



Using the PRC process, members can influence and enhance professional standards and improve system-wide accountability.

Members must now **opt in** to receive Nurse Planner

■ AS THE ways nurses schedule their working lives evolve, each year more UNA members have transitioned from the use of UNA's printed Nurses Planner calendar to electronic versions on their smart phones and computers.

For UNA members who wish to continue to receive the Nurse Planner, however, they can still receive a Planner even as

demand among the membership declines.

Members who wish to continue receiving the Nurse Planner must go online to either the DMS Web or the UNA App and opt-in. (Go to "Membership Information" and click on the toggle button under "Receiving Nurse Planner" to opt in for another year.)

Members will have to opt in **each year** to continue receiving the Planner.

The 2024 Nurse Planner came with a separate plastic cover. To reduce waste, UNA hopes members will reuse the plastic covers in 2025 and future years. Nurses who require a new cover in future years will have to order it separately on the opt-in page **before August 30, 2024.** 🌸



By Dewey Funk
Occupational Health &
Safety Advisor

ILLICIT SUBSTANCES IN HEALTH CARE SETTINGS pose a serious, growing risk

■ *A patient is admitted to an Acute Care facility. An RN enters the patient's room wearing a surgical mask and gloves. She smells something in the air. Has an illicit substance been consumed by the patient? The RN feels shaky, nauseated, a headache begins. She goes to the Emergency Room with these symptoms, fills out a WCB claim, and requires time off to recover ...*

Patients consuming illicit substances within health-care facilities pose significant risks to nurses and other health-care workers.

Yet Alberta nurses still frequently find themselves filling out Workers Compensation claims after being impacted by illicit substances consumed by patients inside health-care facilities.

I am aware of three nurses who reported being exposed to illicit substances on the job within a single week. I believe this happens more frequently than it is reported.

Illicit substances are chemicals, and therefore a Code Brown should be called.

So, how should nurses respond to this growing problem?

Illicit substances are chemicals, and therefore a Code Brown should be called.

Some nurses have hesitated to do so because Code procedures didn't refer to illicit substances, and health-care sites too often failed to educate staff about what procedures to follow for exposure.

On May 24, however, Alberta Health Services President and CEO Athana Mentzelopoulos sent a message about this to AHS staff:

"In recent days, I have heard increasing reports of illicit drug use in our health care facilities," she wrote. "The safety of our staff, physicians, patients and visitors is of paramount importance and this is an unacceptable risk.

"AHS has a duty of care to maintain safe facilities for all and I want to ensure you have the information to keep you and our patients safe," Mentzelopoulos's message continued. "When our health care providers are responding to a situation where illicit drugs are being used, they should prioritize their own safety and call a Code Brown so teams can respond in a standardized and safe fashion."

She concluded: "I want to support and enable you to move towards feeling authorized to have a zero-tolerance mentality when it comes to illicit drug use in our facilities. Your work at our sites is valued and appreciated and your safety is essential."

Alberta's *Occupational Health and Safety Act* enforces the obligation of employers to provide a safe and healthy workplace under Part 1 (General Obligations):

□ CONTINUED ON PAGE 19

“Err on the side of caution when you encounter illicit substances.
Remember, workers have the right to refuse dangerous work.
You are an important person and your health and safety matter!”



□ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

“3(1) Every employer shall ensure, as far as it is reasonably practicable for the employer to do so, (a) the health, safety and welfare of (i) workers engaged in the work of that employer, (ii) those workers not engaged in the work of that employer but present at the work site at which that work is being carried out, and (iii) other persons at or in the vicinity of the work site whose health and safety may be materially affected by identifiable and controllable hazards originating from the work site.”

UNA strongly recommends reporting exposure to illicit substances through your employer’s reporting system – MySafetyNet (MSN) at AHS and Reporting Line at Covenant Health.

Employers are required by law to investigate and identify corrective actions.

You have a right to receive and review the employer’s completed investigation and corrective-action report. You should ask for the report. If it is not provided to you within the employer’s timelines – five days for MSN – contact UNA’s OHS advisors with details of the report, including the file number if you have it and the date it was filed. We will follow up to ensure you receive a copy.

In the past, UNA has raised a number of questions and concerns with AHS representatives regarding these types of incidents, including:

- Who is responsible for conducting the search of patients and their belongings when illicit substances are suspected?
- What are ‘reasonable grounds’ to search a patient?

- How do staff access protective services personnel when illicit substances are suspected?
- Do protective services personnel understand their role in such situations?
- How long must a room be evacuated following an illicit substance exposure.

Code Brown procedures and scenarios need to explicitly reference illicit substance use.

We also need to look at what steps the employer will put in place for the safety of health-care workers who encounter illicit substance use in community settings.

AHS has struck a provincial task force to address concerns about illicit substance use in the workplace. The employer is addressing concerns UNA has presented and is listening and providing updates as the process unfolds.

Interim measures have been implemented. The employer has already changed the wording of the Code Brown procedures to provide greater scope to the meaning of Code Brown to include the release of an illicit chemical.

Please continue to report concerns of illicit substance use in health care settings and keep UNA’s OHS advisors updated as we go forward.

Err on the side of caution when you encounter illicit substances.
Remember, workers have the right to refuse dangerous work. You are an important person and your health and safety matter! 🍷

UNA continues call for nurses to be included in presumptive coverage for psychological injuries

■ **ALBERTA** nurses continue to call on the province to include nurses in presumptive coverage for psychological injuries by Workers' Compensation, which is extended to other first responders such as police officers, fire fighters and paramedics.

"Through the nature of their work, nurses are routinely exposed to traumatic events in the workplace"

- Heather Smith

"Through the nature of their work, nurses are routinely exposed to traumatic events in the workplace," United Nurses of Alberta President Heather Smith said last year. "Nurses should not be forced to wait for – or be denied – access to Workers' Compensation benefits after experiencing traumatic events while on the job."

UNA will continue to press for recognition that nurses working on the front lines of the health care system should be included with other first responders

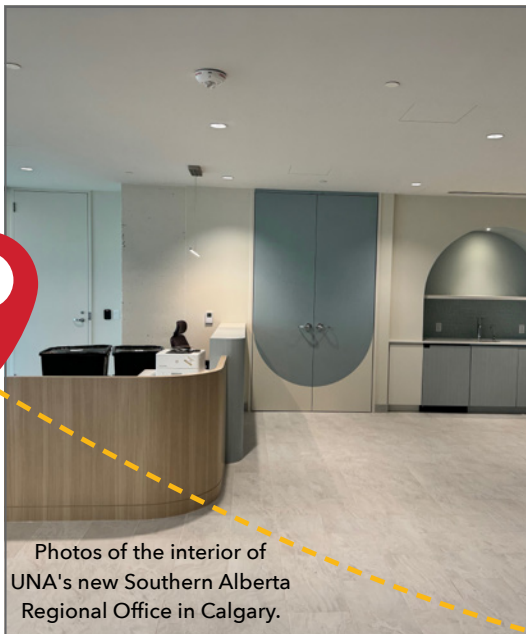
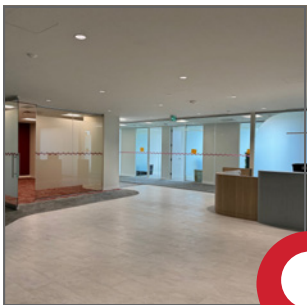
in not needing to provide proof of a causal link to post-traumatic stress disorder and workplace incidents to receive coverage, UNA Second Vice-President Cameron Westhead said in a statement on May 15.

Last fall, UNA member and Registered Nurse Heather Murray spearheaded the collection of around 1,000 signatures from nurses and supporters calling for nurses to have access to presumptive coverage for compensation. The petition was tabled in the Legislature on November 7.

Those occupations who have been given presumptive coverage, the government rightly said in a recent news release published on May 9, "experience post-traumatic stress injuries at significantly higher rates than the general population."

□ CONTINUED ON PAGE 21

Southern Alberta Regional Office MOVES TO NEW LOCATION



Photos of the interior of UNA's new Southern Alberta Regional Office in Calgary.

■ **AFTER** more than 20 years on Kensington Road in Calgary, United Nurses of Alberta's Southern Alberta Regional Office has moved to a new location.

The new Calgary office is located at 60 Uxborough Place NW, near the Foothills Medical Centre and the new Arthur J.E. Child Comprehensive Cancer Centre.

During the office move by UNA's Calgary-based staff, both locations were closed to in-person visitors. The new Calgary office fully opened on June 3. 🌸

So do nurses, who are also first responders, Westhead pointed out.

Alberta Jobs, Economy and Trade Minister Matt Jones said in the May 9 release that “first responders and emergency workers have Albertans’ backs, and Alberta’s government is committed to supporting their mental health needs.”

He was announcing \$1.5 million in grants for research on how to improve treatment and prevention programs to “help alleviate some of the suffering first responders and emergency workers living with post-traumatic stress injuries face.”

The next day, Health Minister Adriana LaGrange marked National Nurses

Week by publishing a certificate lauding Alberta’s nurses for their “integral role in the delivery of high-quality care to Albertans.”

Yet in Alberta nurses continue to have to prove they are suffering from traumatic psychological injuries that result from a workplace event to have their psychological injury claims for Workers Compensation approved.

The only obvious difference is that the professions that receive presumptive coverage are dominated by men, while in the nursing profession most practitioners are women. “This is discriminatory and unfair,” said Westhead. “We won’t rest until this discriminatory omission is eliminated.” 🍷



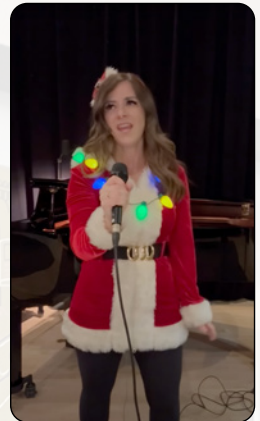
United Nurses of Alberta is proud to have received an award from the Canadian Association of Labour Media for the union's popular "Code Blue Christmas" music video.

The Christmas season has come and gone, but UNA's "Code Blue Christmas" music video was the winner of the Dennis McGann Stroke-of-Genius Award for the most unusual, innovative, novel communications project at the annual CALM conference in Edmonton.

The video featured UNA Local 307 member Whitney Ramsden Jensen's spirited rendition of "Code Blue Christmas," a parody of All I Want for Christmas.

The music video has been played more than 1 million times on Facebook and 44,000 times on Instagram. In it, the community health Registered Nurse from Central Alberta tells what nurses want for Christmas - and "it starts with our government, actually listening to our pleas," she sings.

Give it a listen! ➔



Code Blue Christmas



CANADIAN
FEDERATION
OF NURSES
UNIONS

Fighting for health care at all ages



By Linda Silas
President, Canadian
Federation of Nurses Unions

■ **Health** is a fundamental human right. The right to health for all means everyone should have access to the health care they need, when and where they need it, without suffering financial hardship. Time and time again, it has been proven that public health care produces better health outcomes.

Canada has long been a proud global leader in public health care. But today, our cherished public health care system is being threatened by blatant privatization efforts across the country.

As recent media investigations into for-profit nurse staffing agencies show, profiteers saw the health care crisis as an opportunity to line their pockets.

CFNU has been pushing for auditors general in every province and territory to scrutinize the use of these agencies, whose operations have been shrouded in secrecy. The New Brunswick Auditor General took the call to heart and the findings are shocking. Auditor General Paul Martin pointed to contracts with little value for the \$173 million of taxpayer money that was spent over just two years. His report details questionable billing practices, auto-renewal clauses, and no legal review or competitive vendor selection process.

Alarming, in several jurisdictions, decisions to work with for-profit agencies to fill staffing needs were not supported by data, only informal reports. In many cases, the needs of the facility were not well documented, and some contracts allowed agencies to deploy health care teams regardless of need.

Decisions about health human resources should never be profit-driven. These decisions must be

rooted in strong data to support the needs of patients.

As we told Doug Wylie, the Auditor General of Alberta, we cannot let this blatant misuse of health care funding go unchecked.

Analysis of these for-profit agencies is sorely needed. This fall, CFNU's research study into for-profit nursing agencies will shed more light on the impact these agencies have had in Alberta, and the cost to taxpayers.

Nurses unions will not stand idle while billions of our health care dollars are being poured into private, for-profit agencies. These health care dollars should have been used to bolster the health care workforce and ensure we have the resources needed to deliver the best quality of care to our patients.

Access to care relies on you. This is the message we are taking to premiers at the Council of the Federation meeting in July – access to care at all ages relies on nurses. It relies on improving your working conditions, ensuring you have competitive wages, protecting your safety, and giving you the breaks you need and deserve.

I will continue to be unapologetic in demanding better for nurses and patients and encourage you to join me. Add your voice at profitdoesnotcare.ca and tell our elected leaders that health care is about people, not profits.

It's high time we take corporate profits out of public health care. Together, we will fight for better working conditions, better salaries and a better life. And together, we will win.

In unwavering solidarity,
Linda Silas,
CFNU President 🍷

Decisions about health human resources should never be profit-driven.

WHEN KNOWLEDGE MEETS KNOW-HOW

On April 28, 2024, the **WORKERS DAY OF MOURNING**, Alberta was still chipping away at worker safety

■ **MEMBERS** of United Nurses of Alberta and other unions marked the International Day of Mourning for workers killed, injured, or made ill on the job at ceremonies on Sunday, April 28, in Calgary, Red Deer and Edmonton.

As Registered Nurses and Registered Psychiatric Nurses represented by UNA serving on the front lines of a health care system battered by intentional government underfunding, massive politically motivated reorganization, and a worldwide shortage of health care workers, they and other workers realize provincial policies are chipping away at worker safety and health.

After passage of the *Ensuring Safety and Cutting Red Tape Act* in 2020, Alberta workers saw rights they needed to ensure their safety at work significantly rolled back.

Changes done in the name of reducing red tape included watering down the Joint Health and Safety Committee system, eliminating requirements for workers to participate in worksite safety inspections, and eroding the right of workers to refuse unsafe work by making it easier for employers to punish those who refuse dangerous work.

With the government now reviewing Part 27 of the *Occupational Health and Safety Code*, which deals with violence and harassment in the workplace, their concerns have been compounded. Slogans like “red tape reduction” and “modernization” generally mean the government is about to further weaken legislation and regulations that keep workers safe, UNA OHS Advisor Dewey Funk warned.

Part 27 as it is now written requires employers to develop a plan, policy and procedure with requirements for



corrective actions to mitigate violence in the workplace. Employers must also do a review when violent incidents take place.

This is not enough, Funk said, but the concern now is that the Part 27 review will result in further weakening of the Code's already inadequate protections.

The Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Northern Development's Part 27 review intends to combine the language concerning harassment and violence, taking away the prescriptive components that employers are required to follow. Those requirements in harassment procedures must remain independent, Funk said. 🍷

UNA members at the Day of Mourning event at Grant Notley Park in Edmonton.



UNA members at the 2024 Labour School in Canmore.


UNA MEMBERS SHARPEN SKILLS AT CANMORE LABOUR SCHOOL

■ **UNITED** Nurses of Alberta members from across Alberta travelled to the mountain town of Canmore to sharpen their skills at UNA's Labour School.

The four-day educational event was held April 22 to 26, 2024.

UNA members attending the school were immersed in a wide-range of course topics, including creating inclusive workplaces, mental health and addictions, scheduling, contract interpretation, and communicating with management, and more.

Students at the school also heard from a range of guest speakers, including UNA President Heather Smith and Alberta Federation of Labour Secretary-Treasurer Karen Kuprys.

UNA Educators, Labour Relations Officers, Professional Responsibility Advisors, Occupational Health & Safety Advisors, and Managers shared their professional expertise with students by acting as facilitators at the school. 





UNA WELCOMES LEADERSHIP PLACEMENT STUDENT



Priya Vyas

■ **PRIYA** Vyas, a Bachelor of Nursing Science student at the University of Alberta, says she looks forward to exploring aspects of nursing advocacy during her leadership placement with UNA.

“In addition to learning about union dynamics and what my rights consist of as an Undergraduate Nurse Employee and future RN,” she said, “having the privilege to complete my placement

with the union gives me direct insight into many things students are often unaware of, such as union advocacy, legislative efforts, collective bargaining, professional development, and ways that members can be engaged and empowered.”

Vyas, who holds a BSc in Health Studies from the University of Waterloo, will complete her term with UNA in July. 🍷

Nurses at AgeCare Glenmore and Extendicare Hillcrest in Calgary vote to join UNA

■ **NURSES** employed at AgeCare Glenmore and Extendicare Hillcrest in Calgary voted to join UNA in May. The results of those votes were certified by the Alberta Labour Relations Board in May 2024.

UNA will meet with the new members as soon as possible and negotiate a first collective agreement for the nurses, who before the vote worked without representation by a union. New UNA members employed at these worksites have not yet been assigned a UNA Local number.

UNA already represented Registered Nurses and Registered Psychiatric employed at other AgeCare and Extendicare worksites. Those sites include AgeCare Midnapore (Local 406) and AgeCare Skypointe (Local 427) in Calgary and AgeCare Valleyview (Local 137) in Medicine Hat, and Extendicare Eaux Claires (Local 117), Vulcan Extendicare (Local 143), Extendicare Mayerthorpe (Local 143), Extendicare Holyrood (Local 168), Extendicare Leduc (Local 170), Extendicare Viking (Local 215), and Extendicare Cedars Villa (Local 422). 🍷



AgeCare Glenmore

photo: www.agecare.ca/communities/glenmore/



Extendicare Hillcrest

photo: www.extendicarehillcrest.com/

UNA members reminded to claim their 2% RRSP or TFSA supplement

■ **MEMBERS** of United Nurses of Alberta need to remember their employer has agreed to contribute to a supplemental pension plan in the form of a Registered Retirement Savings Plan or Tax Free Savings Account contribution.

UNA strongly recommends that all members who are regular employees act to take advantage of this provision if they haven't done so. It is a benefit they cannot receive without taking specific action to enroll. So, without acting, employees are going without a 2-per-cent retirement income supplement to their salary that they are entitled to receive under the collective agreement.

Article 29.05 of the UNA Provincial Collective Agreement states:

The Employer shall provide a supplemental pension plan in the form of a Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP). The Employer shall also provide a Tax Free Savings Account (TFSA). Employees shall determine the allocation of contributions to either the RRSP or the TFSA. Employees may change their allocation effective April 1st of each year.

(a) *Effective on the Employee's date of enrollment, a Regular Employee shall have the right to contribute up to 2% of regular earnings into either the RRSP or TFSA:*

(i) *Employees may contribute into the RRSP until December 30th of the year*

the Employee turns 71. The Employer shall match the Employee's contributions into the RRSP; or

(ii) *Employees may contribute into the TFSA. The Employer shall match the Employee's contributions into the TFSA.*

(b) *Regular Employees who, by virtue of their age, no longer qualify under Article 29.05(b)(i), shall have the option of reallocating contributions to the TFSA as per Article 29.05(b)(ii) or receive an additional 2% of their regular earnings. Employees may change their allocation between participating in the TFSA and receiving 2% of regular earnings effective April 1st of each year.*

(c) *Earnings as defined in Article 29.05(b) above, will include WCB earnings until such time that the Employee exhausts accrued sick leave credits and is deemed to be on sick leave without pay.*

The agreement does require that employees contribute 2 per cent of their salary for the employer to match, and employees need to enroll in the program for the employer to contribute this money.

No UNA member should go without funds for their retirement that their employer has agreed to contribute.

This supplemental pension is not available to temporary or casual employees.



KNOW your Rights



Report from
Director of Labour Relations
David Harrigan

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your UNA local executive or Labour Relations Officer at 1-800-252-9394.



Monte

Show your support with a '3Rs: Respect, Retain, Recruit' lawn sign

Insufficient staffing levels and high workloads resulting from the current staffing shortage are forcing nurses to leave the profession. Our health care system cannot survive without nurses.

Support Alberta's nurses by putting a "3Rs: Respect, Retain, Recruit" lawn sign on your lawn or in your window.



Anyone can order a lawn sign by going to:
<https://neednurses.ca/action/request-a-lawn-sign>

