

Imagine
AGM'24

**UNA's largest annual
general meeting**

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RALLY FOR RESPECT**

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NEWS Bulletin **UNA** United Nurses of Alberta

TOUGH BARGAINING & MEDIATION AHEAD

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



SOLIDARITY AND DETERMINATION are imperative in 2025

■ **THE** holiday season is upon us, and I wish every one of you, your loved ones, and your co-workers, the best of the season, and a happy and prosperous 2025.

In the New Year, solidarity and determination will be imperative if we are to achieve a new collective agreement that respects nurses in Alberta.

In provincial bargaining on October 30, the message of UNA's members was clear, and your Negotiations Committee will return to the bargaining table with Alberta Health Services, Covenant Health, Recovery Alberta, Lamont Health Care, and The Bethany Group (Camrose) with renewed determination to reach an agreement that is acceptable to all.

We met with the employers on November 20, and we have informed them that they are going to have to go back to the government to get a new bargaining mandate that reflects the expectations of UNA's members.

UNA has applied for formal Mediation and agreed to accept the employers' Essential Services Agreements, a step that is required to move the process forward.

I expect the weeks ahead to see some extremely tough bargaining and mediation, but I remain hopeful that with determination and solidarity, we will see our way through to a new collective agreement.

I am thankful to you all for the extraordinary work you do, and for your determination and commitment to our success in bargaining.

We will go forward together.

Stay well! Stay safe! Stay strong! Stay united!
We will do this together.

Heather Smith
President, United Nurses of Alberta

Front Cover: UNA members at the Rally for Respect outside the Alberta Legislature on October 24

TOUGH BARGAINING AND MEDIATION

will be required to reach
new collective agreement



■ **TOUGH** bargaining and mediation are going to be required for United Nurses of Alberta to reach a new collective agreement in 2025,” UNA President Heather Smith says.

“With the rejection of the Mediator’s recommended settlement on October 30, solidarity and determination are going to be imperative in 2025 if we are to achieve a new collective agreement that respects nurses in Alberta,” she said.

Negotiations for a new Provincial Collective Agreement between United Nurses of Alberta and the employer group made up of Alberta Health Services, Covenant Health, Recovery Alberta, Lamont Health Care Centre and The Bethany Group (Camrose) resumed for one day on November 20.

During that meeting, UNA’s Negotiating Committee told the employer bargaining team that on October 30 when the union’s members voted against ratifying a recommended settlement reached in informal mediation, they sent a clear message that any new agreement must include compensation to make up for the losses suffered by Alberta’s nurses over the past several years due to inflation.

“The Negotiating Committee informed the employers that they were going to have to go back to the government to get a new bargaining mandate that reflects that requirement,” the union’s lead negotiator, Labour Relations Director David Harrigan, said in a public statement that day.

In addition, the UNA Negotiating Committee told their employer

counterparts that the union would apply for formal mediation as quickly as possible to push the process forward.

At a province-wide online meeting on November 19, the presidents of all UNA Locals whose members are included in the Provincial Collective Agreement voted to authorize the Negotiating Committee to sign off on all essential services agreements (ESAs) immediately. That motion was introduced on the recommendation of the Negotiating Committee.

The Labour Relations Code, which governs collective bargaining, requires the Alberta Labour Relations Board (LRB) to approve all ESAs before formal mediation can proceed. Formal mediation is one of several steps required by Alberta labour law that must be completed before a legal strike may take place.

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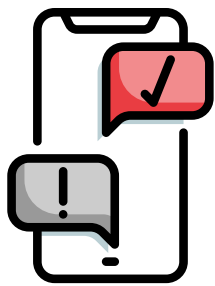
Members sent a clear message that any new agreement must include compensation to make up for the losses suffered by Alberta’s nurses over the past several years due to inflation.

Details of October 30 vote

■ **ON** October 30, nurses covered by the Provincial Collective Agreement voted to reject a recommended settlement that had been proposed by a Mediator.

In the online vote, 61.12 per cent of the eligible members who voted rejected the Mediator’s recommended settlement. While a majority of members in 60 percent of locals voted to ratify the agreement, a majority of all UNA members province-wide voted against ratifying the agreement. A majority of locals and members are required to ratify an agreement.

All locals covered by the agreement participated in the vote; 75 per cent of the more than 30,000 members covered by the agreement voted. 🍷



UNA BARGAINING SURVEY

commenced on November 12

■ **AFTER** the October 30 vote on the Mediator's Recommended Settlement, UNA made the decision to conduct a new telephone bargaining survey of members.

Participants in the survey by Factor Research were selected randomly according to recognized polling principles to provide a sampling of the membership's views as we proceed back into bargaining. Polling was completed on November 27, 2024.



[/www.una.ca/1589/una-bargaining-survey-begins-on-november-12](http://www.una.ca/1589/una-bargaining-survey-begins-on-november-12)

All UNA members polled were determined to have no role in internal UNA work such as serving on Local Executives or on the UNA Executive Board.

All information collected through the survey is confidential and anonymous. To protect members' privacy, dialling

was computerized. This means that although the telephone interviewer knows the name of the member they are calling, they do not know, and cannot access, the member's phone number or any other contact information.

After responses were collected, Factor Research combined and aggregated all the data before sharing the results with UNA.

The survey had a sample size of 1,500 – considered by polling professionals to be a representative sample of UNA members. The data collected will help further inform the negotiations committee as the bargaining process continues.

More information is available on UNA's website. 🇨🇦

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A neutral third-party Mediator appointed by the Alberta Mediation Services would try to assist the union and employers to reach an agreement. This is known as formal mediation. If there is room for a mediated settlement, the Mediator could write recommendations. Mediator's recommendations are not binding and either party is free to accept or reject them.

So, the remaining steps before a legal strike could commence::

- All ESAs must be in place, filed with the LRB, and accepted by the LRB
- Formal mediation did not result in an agreement
- A strike vote was held with majority support for a strike
- The results of the strike vote were filed with the LRB

- Strike notice was served on the employers within 120 days of the date of the strike vote
- 72 hours have passed since strike notice was served

At that point, a legal strike could commence if the government did not take other measures, such as declaring a Disputes Inquiry Board (DIB) to delay or prevent it, or passing legislation banning a strike as the Alberta Government has publicly advocated in the case of several labour disputes in federal jurisdiction.

This Provincial Collective Agreement covers more than 33,000 Registered Nurses and Registered Psychiatric Nurses represented by UNA. Negotiations for a new agreement began in February 2024. 🇨🇦



Negotiations for a new agreement began in February 2024.

Alberta nurses rallied for respect on October 24

■ **MORE** than 1,000 UNA nurses joined a massive demonstration billed as a Rally for Respect outside the Alberta Legislature on the last day of the union's AGM.

Estimates suggest that as many as 10,000 people took part in the October 24 rally, called by several unions to back the approximately 250,000 Alberta public employees in bargaining with boards, agencies, commissions and directly with the Alberta government itself.

Participants in the rally from all major public sector unions representing nurses, teachers, education workers, municipal workers – as well as families, friends and members of the public – shouted their support of the right to strike in collective bargaining, and in particular for the CUPE education workers bargaining with school boards in Edmonton and Fort McMurray.

Chants like “Stand up! Fight back!” echoed across the public square in front of the Legislature Building.

Short speeches by the leaders of Alberta public sector unions including UNA, the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, the Health Sciences Association of Alberta, and CUPE indicated they are fed up with “secret mandates” provisions inserted into Alberta labour law in 2019, which allow the government to surreptitiously manipulate the collective bargaining process.

“I’m here representing 35,000 nurses from all across this province,” UNA President Heather Smith told the cheering crowd. “I just want to say we are here because of respect – actually, we’re here because of disrespect! And it’s not just disrespect for nurses, it’s not just disrespect for health care workers, it’s not just disrespect for education workers, teachers and doctors. It’s disrespect for all Albertans!”

“We are here because of respect – actually, we’re here because of disrespect”

– Heather Smith

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Scenes from the
October 24 Rally.
Photos by Lindsey Tran.

"We all know we
must continue to
fight for tomorrow,
for ourselves and for
all Albertans"
- Heather Smith

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"At least Ralph Klein and his 'Third Way' didn't try to deceive the people about what he intended," Smith continued. "Danielle Smith with her fourth way is deceiving the citizens of this province for months! That is the ultimate disrespect!"

"So we're here today to say we are fighting today, and what is happening to labour in this province today, but we all know we must continue to fight for tomorrow, for ourselves and for all Albertans!"

The rally took place two days after the Alberta government mandated the Edmonton Public School Board and CUPE, which represents its support staff, to work with a disputes inquiry board to settle their labour dispute.

The messages on signs held by UNA members at the rally emphasized to the Alberta government that Alberta nurses deserve respect, safe staffing, and better working conditions. 🍷







UNA Members Rally in Canmore on November 20th.

UNA Locals RALLY FOR RESPECT



■ **THE** fall and winter of 2024 have seen UNA rallies to support bargaining take place near health care facilities in various locations.

Most recently rallies were organized by Local 33 at the Royal Alexandra Hospital on November 8, Local 3 and Local 119 at the Canmore General Hospital on November 20, and Local

301 at the University of Alberta Hospital on November 22.

The UNA members joined their co-workers from other unions and supporters to call on the Alberta government to respect front-line health care workers and take action to protect safe patient care by fixing the staffing crisis. 🇨🇦

UNA Members Rally outside of University of Alberta Hospital on November 22nd.



UNA Members Rally outside of Royal Alexandra Hospital on November 8th.



New law clearly designed to stop Albertans from exercising their **DEMOCRATIC RIGHT TO PICKET AND PROTEST**: AFL

■ **THE** UCP government plans to strip rights from Alberta health care workers and allies by outlawing demonstrations around public health care facilities, Alberta Federation of Labour President Gil McGowan said in early November.

Citing amendments buried in the United Conservative government's Bill 31, the *Justice Statutes Amendment Act*, McGowan said the addition of hospitals, continuing care homes, mental health facilities, and other facilities to the *Critical Infrastructure Defense Act* will take away protest rights from thousands of Albertans.

"Unions representing hundreds of thousands of public-sector workers are bargaining with the UCP government for better wages and working conditions," he said. "These changes are a clear message that the Danielle Smith government is willing to take away their right to protest."

"The right to strike and the right to protest are basic democratic rights protected by the constitution. Albertans should be very worried by the authoritarian drift of the Smith government."

The *Critical Infrastructure Defense Act* was passed in 2020 and restricts Albertans from protesting near such things as highways and railways. Bill 31 adds public health care facilities, as well as some privately owned facilities, to the list.

McGowan said: "When Jason Kenney passed this law four years ago, we voiced concerns that it was far reaching, unconstitutional, and punitive. We warned that the UCP government was willing to use all tools to stop or discourage all collective action that goes against the UCP agenda, including potential labour or worker action. Today's amendments do just that." 🍷



Alberta Federation of Labour President Gil McGowan at the October 24th Rally for Respect

UNA'S OCTOBER AGM WAS THE LARGEST IN THE UNION'S HISTORY



■ **UNITED** Nurses of Alberta's 2024 annual general meeting was the largest in the union's history with more than 1,100 delegates, observers, staff members, and guests welcomed to the Edmonton Convention Centre by President Heather Smith on October 22.

Respect at the Alberta Legislature by public sector union members and their supporters.

In between, members heard reports from elected officers and senior union managers, considered the state of bargaining for a new Provincial Collective Agreement, heard from high-profile labour economist Jim Stanford (speaking from Australia via Zoom) on

Scenes from the 2024 AGM.

Photos by Lindsey Tran

The AGM culminated on October 24 with participation in the mass Rally for

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Imagine... AGM'24



Heather Smith



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the state of the Alberta and Canadian economies, participated in elections for some district representative positions, and passed an annual budget for 2025.

Participants also listened to a panel on the challenges facing health care and other public services. Alberta Federation of Labour President Gil McGowan moderated the discussion by panelists Heather Smith, Alberta

Teachers Association President Jason Schilling, Parkland Institute Research Manager Rebecca Graff-McRae, and Friends of Medicare Executive Director Chris Gallaway.

Longtime nursing and union activist Pauline Worsfold was honoured with the 2024 UNA Bread & Roses Award. 🌹



Nursing advocate and activist **Pauline Worsfold honoured with UNA Bread & Roses Award**



Pauline Worsfold,
with her son Colin.



■ **PAULINE** Worsfold, an experienced voice for nurses and nursing, was honoured with the 2024 UNA Bread & Roses Award on October 24 at UNA's AGM.

UNA President Heather Smith recounted Worsfold's accomplishments, starting with the beginning of her union journey as a ward rep with the Staff Nurses' Association of Alberta at Edmonton's University of Alberta Hospital in 1981.

"She played a crucial role in leading the amalgamation of the two nursing unions in our province, forming UNA as we know it today," Smith recalled. The union of SNAA and UNA took place in 1997, soon after Worsfold became president of SNAA.

Worsfold made an important contribution to the decision by Alberta nurses to join the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, Smith noted, eventually serving as CFNU's national secretary-treasurer. She also served a decade on the board of the Canadian Health Coalition, lobbying tirelessly for national pharmacare.

What's more, Smith noted to laughter, "Pauline's an accomplished race car driver – and I know ... I've been in her car!"

Worsfold told the AGM she was "humbled and honoured" by the award. "I share this award with all of you ... you who are doing the work, day in, day out, in the locals, big and small, near and far."

She thanked her many mentors and teachers in the union movement. "What fun we had! What challenges we were able to mount. These individuals shaped who I am as an activist, unionist, and a feminist. To them I say, thank you."

Thanking her family, Worsfold observed that "we fight for bread, to feed our families, and we fight for roses to nourish our souls. Take the time to celebrate your wins, big and small, before you move on to the next challenge, and the one after that. Because we must believe, the work we do today and tomorrow will ensure the world is a better place." 🌹

PAST BREAD & ROSES AWARD RECIPIENTS:

2020:

Karen Kuprys,
Local 154
(Youville Home)

2021:

Marie Corns,
Local 80
(High River General Hospital)

2022:

Orissa Shima,
Local 85
(Sturgeon Community Hospital)

2023:

Diane Lantz,
Local 1
(Peter Loughheed Centre)

Karen Kuprys acclaimed as 2nd VP, replacing Cameron Westhead

Heather Smith is acclaimed to her 18th term as UNA President



Heather Smith



Karen Kuprys



Cameron Westhead

■ **UNA'S** 2024 Annual General Meeting saw an important change in the leadership of the United Nurses of Alberta as one longtime nursing activist replaced another as the union's Second Vice-President on October 24.

Three-term 2nd VP Cameron Westhead, who had chosen not to seek re-election, was replaced by Karen Kuprys, who has served as secretary treasurer of the Alberta Federation of Labour since 2021. Kuprys was acclaimed to the position.

Westhead was first elected as 2nd VP in 2019, was acclaimed in 2021 to a one-year term extension made necessary by the pandemic, and acclaimed again to his third term in 2022.

Before becoming one of UNA's Executive Officers, Westhead was an Operating Room nurse in Calgary and served as NDP MLA for Banff-Cochrane from 2015 to 2019.

He said he made the difficult decision to return to the OR as the end of his third term approached.

"I've been in full-time elected roles for nine years now, and I've enjoyed

every minute of it," he explained. "I've been glad to have been part of the various constituencies I've been able to support, but it takes a lot of time away from home, a lot of time travelling."

"I've been a nurse for 20 years now, nine years in the OR and, reflecting on my career, I found myself considering a return to patient care," he said. "I'm glad for everything I've done. I'm proud of everything I've done. But I thought now was a good time to go back to direct nursing."

Westhead accepted a position in the Operating Room at the Royal Jubilee Hospital in Victoria, B.C., starting in December.

Kuprys, a gerontology nurse from the Edmonton region, has been involved in UNA since she graduated from nursing school in 1993.

Throughout her nursing career she has held a series of important UNA elected positions – secretary of Local 154 at the Youville Home/Foyer Lacombe in St. Albert, local president for 10 years, local VP for 14 years, and a member of UNA's Board for a decade.

Three-term 2nd VP Cameron Westhead, who had chosen not to seek re-election, was replaced by Karen Kuprys, who has served as secretary treasurer of the Alberta Federation of Labour since 2021.

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Gil McGowan



Paul Parks, AMA



Jim Stanford



Chris Galloway



Rebecca Graff-

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She called her time at the AFL “a huge growing experience. I am very grateful for all the opportunities I had to learn even more about the labour movement and build strong relationships within our movement.”

In her new position as one of UNA’s four EOs, she said, “I really want to focus on member engagement and support of local executives. There are

many forces that tend to divide us right now. I think it is critical to strengthen what unites us. I have always been a proud UNA member and I’m looking forward to working with the other officers.”

Also during the 2024 AGM, Heather Smith was acclaimed to her 18th term as UNA’s president.

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David Harrigan





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After graduating as an RN in Ottawa in 1976, Smith moved to Alberta in 1977 and began working at the Edmonton General Hospital. There, she served as president of UNA Local 79 for five years. She was elected president of UNA in 1988 and has served in that capacity ever since. She has been a member of every UNA provincial negotiating committee since 1985.

With the exception of the North Central District, where four District Representatives were elected, most District Representatives were acclaimed this year. The names of the representatives acclaimed or elected this year are listed below:

DISTRICT REPS

NORTH

Margaret Nasedkin

NORTH CENTRAL

Eva Brown

Tim Bouwsema

Michelle Bourdon

Jens Gundermann

CENTRAL

Thomas Edwards

Heather Venneman

SOUTH CENTRAL

Faisal Kassam

Melissa Field

Wanda Deadman

James Zachary

SOUTH

Alberta Brown



MAKING NURSES' VOICES HEARD 'Respect for nurses – non-negotiable!'



By Linda Silas
President, Canadian
Federation of Nurses Unions

■ **Canada** needs a bold vision for the future of our health care and Alberta is no exception. Over the past few years of a growing staffing crisis, the cracks in our public health care systems have only grown deeper and wider.

These cracks are symptoms of an incomplete health care system. I first noticed it when I was nursing at the bedside: patients ending up in the Emergency Room with dire illnesses that could have been prevented if they had a primary care provider monitoring early symptoms. I know for nurses and health care workers across the country, this experience is all too familiar.

As nurses, we are uniquely positioned to see the cracks in our health care systems. But our unique position, combined with our grit, compassion and determination, means we also see the solutions.

From safe nurse-patient ratios to universal and comprehensive pharmacare, we are ensuring our governments and elected leaders are not only hearing nurses' voices – they're listening, respecting and acting.

From safe nurse-patient ratios to universal and comprehensive pharmacare, we are ensuring our governments and elected leaders are not only hearing nurses'

voices – they're listening, respecting and acting.

With a federal election looming, nurses' voices are as important as ever. We know, politicians don't see the light, they feel the heat. And we're holding their feet to the fire.

This winter, United Nurses of Alberta leaders will join nurse union leaders from across the country in Ottawa for a full day of face-to-face meetings with federal policymakers about nurses' most pressing issues. We're pressing our federal leaders to put \$1 billion of funding behind Health Canada's *Nursing Retention Toolkit*, aimed at improving your working lives through concrete actions and programs to improve health care working conditions.

Canada relies heavily on internationally educated nurses to fill our growing need for nurses, but we're hearing from too many that they don't have the support they need as they try to join the nursing workforce. We're taking these concerns directly to MPs at our parliamentary breakfast when we launch a new report recommending expanded pathways and support for IENs. IENs need and deserve respect and support every step of the way, and it cannot stop at recruitment. Retention and respect are necessities when nurses are moving across the world to provide care.

But we know IENs are only one piece of the puzzle.

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CANADA ESTABLISHES PHARMACARE EXPERT COMMITTEE

CFNU's Linda Silas named to federal advisory role

■ A new federal committee of experts to recommend options on how to operate and finance a national, universal, single payer pharmacare program in Canada will include Canadian Federation of Nurses President Linda Silas.

The panel, announced by federal health minister Mark Holland on November 14, will offer advice and guidance on the path towards national pharmacare in Canada.

As part of its work, the government said in a news release, the committee will consider perspectives from provincial and territorial governments, Indigenous groups, and experts in relevant fields including public and private drug plan administrators, patients, health care providers, industry, business, labour and academics.

The Committee is supposed to provide a written report to the minister setting out its recommendations by October

10, 2025, which the minister will table in Parliament.

The committee will be chaired by Dr. Nav Persaud, the Canada Research Chair in Health Justice, a staff physician at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto, and associate professor in the Department of family and community medicine at the University of Toronto.

In addition to Silas, members will include Dr. Stéphane Ahern of the Integrated Health and Social Services University Network for West-Central Montreal; Amy Lamb, Director of the Indigenous Pharmacy Professionals of Canada; and Dr. Steve Morgan, professor in the University of British Columbia's School of Population and Public Health.

In addition to providing access to contraception and diabetes medications, the government said it intends to establish a fund for diabetes devices and supplies to help Canadians manage and monitor their diabetes and administer their medication. 🍷



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To truly address the staffing crisis, Canada must take a leadership role in implementing sustainable solutions to the poor working conditions and poor staffing models that are pushing nurses out of the profession. The evidence is clear: safe nurse-patient ratios improve working conditions, nurse retention and, critically, patient care. Canada needs a national plan to bring this life-saving strategy to all our health care settings across the country. Our historic summit on safe nurse-patient ratios was only the start. Together, we will make sure every politician who wants to be elected knows that we need

nurses. We're facing a critical shortage of health care workers, and we will fight to ensure cuts to health care and health staffing are not on the agenda.

As Canada's largest group of regulated health professionals, we are a critical and influential part of the country's health care system. We will fight to ensure nurses' voices continue to be heard. And when we fight, we win for nurses, for Alberta, and for all of Canada.

In unwavering solidarity,
Linda Silas,
CFNU President 🍷

AHS spending of \$330 million on agency nurses since 2022 expected by fiscal year end

■ **BETWEEN** April 2021 and April 2024 Alberta Health Services increased spending on private for-profit nurse staffing agencies from just over \$5 million a year to more than \$156 million in the 2023-2024 fiscal year, *The Progress Report* said on November 25.

That's an increase of roughly 3,000 per cent, according to documents obtained through a freedom of information request by the Edmonton-based publication.

If current trends hold to the end of the current fiscal year, AHS will have spent more than \$330 million on agency nursing over the past three full fiscal years, the online site reported.

Between April 2022 and September 2024, AHS hired 628 Registered Nurses through 21 different staffing agencies. In the same time frame, AHS also hired 121 Licensed Practical Nurses and 119 Health Care Aides through agencies. There were 1,929 placements or contracts. 🍷



The full story is found at
www.theprogressreport.ca.

CANADA PLAYS HOST TO FIRST NURSE-PATIENT RATIO SUMMIT

■ **NURSING** leaders from around the country gathered in Ottawa from November 27-28 for the first Canadian summit on safe nurse-patient ratios, hosted by the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions.

“We are facing a global nursing shortage, and whether in Canada or the United Kingdom, safe nurse staffing is critically important,” said CFNU President Linda Silas, who is co-chaired the summit with Jane Ball, Director of the Institute of Nursing Excellence at the Royal College of Nurses in the United Kingdom.

“We know strong implementation is critical to success and to bringing safe staffing across the country,” Silas said just before the opening of the invitation-only conference. “Working together across jurisdictions, we can solve the nursing shortage

with tangible evidence-based solutions and set the stage for a global recovery.”

Silas said the summit would provide an opportunity to get academic experts, nurses unions, employers and government officials in one room together to explore practical ways to implement this tool for nurse and patient safety across Canada.

Speakers at the Ottawa summit included Chief Nursing Officer of Canada Leigh Chapman, B.C. Nurses Union President Adriane Gear, Nova Scotia Nurses Union President Janet Hazelton, Nursing and Midwifery Federation of Australia Victoria state secretary Lisa Fitzpatrick, and U.S. National Nurses United Director of Nursing Practice Michelle Mahon.

Alberta was the only jurisdiction with no employer or government representatives in attendance. 🍷

Nursing leaders from around the world gathered in Ottawa on November 27 and 28 for the first Canadian summit on safe nurse-patient ratios, organized by the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions. Representing UNA were, from left to right, Research Officer Danusia Moreau, PRC Advisors Cher Gauthier-Fownes and Nicole Scott, and Labour Relations Manager (Specialty Areas) Joshua Bergman



PRC process results in STAFFING IMPROVEMENTS AT EAST EDMONTON URGENT CARE CENTRE



■ **USING** the Professional Responsibility Concern process beginning in 2021, members of Local 196, Edmonton Community, have achieved an increase in baseline staff and physician coverage at the East Edmonton Urgent Care Centre, among other improvements.

Between December 2021 and September 2023, 14 PRCs were filed by Local 196 members related to staffing, care space and efficiency, education, and communication.

Thanks to the changes to date, Alberta Health Services is staffing an increase of at least three nurses on every shift, said Local 196 Second Vice-President Rachael O’Gorman. “While other concerns may remain to be resolved, we have addressed all the current concerns about staffing,” she said.

After discussions with site management in 2022, the Local recognized there was a need to

escalate members’ concerns for more accountability and oversight. After Step 6 meetings took place with senior management and the Executive Director on March 3, 2023, a union-management working group was created to address the concerns.

In addition to the improvements in baseline and physician staffing, one Benefit-Eligible Casual Employee (BECE) position was created, charge and triage staffing levels were improved, and measures to improve staff orientation, education and communications have been implemented.

Unfortunately, concerns not related to staffing levels remain, particularly with 24-hour access to urgent care, the Local says. AHS has been unable to extend the hours of the centre, which closes at 10:30 p.m. This also sometimes requires staff to stop accepting patients and close the doors even earlier, after consulting a trigger-of-closure document developed to ensure staff needs are being better met and working conditions improved.

“The East Edmonton Urgent Care staff and management team are continuing to work collaboratively to improve care for patients and conditions for staff,” O’Gorman said. “We hope the province will see the value in creating more urgent care space in Edmonton.”

“But for now, the staffing, workload, education and communication improvements have made things significantly better for our members,” she concluded. 🍷

“We hope the province will see the value in creating more urgent care space in Edmonton”

– Rachael O’Gorman





By Tim Nessim
UNA OHS Advisor

COVID-19

REMAINS A RISK FOR HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Regardless of changes in employer policy, safe work practices remain unchanged.

PPE JOINT STATEMENT



www.una.ca/document/joint-statement-ppe



SEPTEMBER AHS MASKING DIRECTIVE



extranet.ahsnet.ca/teams/policydocuments/1/clp-ahs-masks-hcs-315.pdf

■ WE used to call this time of year “flu season.” For the past few years, we’ve worried about this time of year bringing a new wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, we’re talking about “respiratory virus season.”

Governments and health care employers alike have stopped speaking about COVID and started speaking about respiratory viruses instead. In particular, health care employers are moving away from COVID-specific mitigation measures and toward general measures for mitigating respiratory viruses.

In some ways, this change is understandable. Rapid antigen tests are less widely available than they used to be, and the last batch shipped by the federal government to the provinces had a December 10, 2024, expiration date. Without widely available testing it is difficult to implement COVID-specific mitigation strategies. In addition, one of the lessons we should have learned from the COVID pandemic is that all respiratory viruses, including flu and RSV, are serious and warrant serious mitigation measures.

However, COVID continues to pose a unique risk to health care workers. Research indicates that COVID continues to carry higher risks of both hospitalization and death than influenza. Long COVID is still poorly understood. As a result, UNA is concerned that governments and health care employers have moved away from COVID-specific mitigation strategies.

This fall, AHS replaced two major COVID policies with generalized

policies for respiratory viruses. Covenant and other health care employers have followed suit. The new policy regarding attendance at work with respiratory virus symptoms was strengthened significantly after UNA’s feedback, even though not all of UNA’s suggestions were incorporated. Employees with respiratory virus symptoms can now report to work if they have been fever-free for 24 hours, they have developed no symptoms in the previous 24 hours, and their overall symptoms have improved in the same period.

Secondly, there are new PPE guidelines when caring for patients with respiratory virus symptoms. AHS’s messaging around the new guidelines has been that the multi-union, multi-employer Joint Statement regarding COVID-19 and Personal Protective Equipment remains in effect.

From UNA’s point of view, this is not entirely accurate. Some aspects of the Joint Statement are in fact reflected in the new guidelines, including workers’ right to choose appropriate PPE based on their point of care risk assessment. However, one important aspect of the Joint Statement has been abandoned: workers are no longer required to wear N95s when they are within 2 metres of a suspected or confirmed COVID case unless they are performing an aerosol generating medical procedure. This change is a serious concern to UNA.

As we’d expect, the number of COVID cases, hospitalizations, and deaths in Alberta increased as we moved into this year’s newly named “respiratory virus season.” We want your holiday

□ CONTINUED ON PAGE 21

AHS drastically cuts training for Joint Workplace Health and Safety Committees



By Joshua Bergman
Labour Relations Manager
(Specialty Areas)

■ **ON** September 19, Alberta Health Services informed UNA it was reducing training for employees who sit on Joint Workplace Health and Safety Committees (JWHSCs) to two hours of online training.

This is a significant departure from the 16 hours of training AHS previously provided and was made in spite of opposition from unions including UNA, the Health Sciences Association of Alberta, and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees.

JWHSCs play a critical role in the **internal responsibility system** that keeps workplaces safe and healthy and AHS's decision to lower the minimum training standards will weaken the effectiveness of these committees and put worker safety at risk.

Sweeping changes were made to Alberta's OHS Legislation with passage of Bill 47 in 2021 by the United Conservative Party Government, which removed the 16 hours of training for JWHSC representatives. However, the legislation set out minimum standards for employers like AHS, which can choose to exceed those standards.

UNA is deeply concerned that AHS has chosen to provide the bare minimum for training, despite the significant and increasing risks health care workers face in their jobs, especially as it relates to violence and harassment. According to a **2019 Government of Canada Report of the Standing Committee on Health**, health care workers have a fourfold higher rate of workplace violence than any other profession.

In a 2024 survey of UNA members, more than 40 per cent reported experiencing physical violence in the previous 12 months. That number rose to 70 per cent when you include name-calling, insults, threats, or intimidation. With proper training, JWHSCs play an important role in reviewing incidents of workplace violence and harassment and making recommendations to prevent future incidents.

AHS is now at the bottom in terms of training standards when compared to most other jurisdictions and health care employers in Canada. **Saskatchewan currently provides five days of training** to those who sit on JWHSCs.

UNA members who sit on JWHSCs should remember that despite the decision by AHS to reduce training, they are entitled to take additional training paid for by the employer that they deem necessary to assist in performing their committee duties. Requests must not be unreasonably denied by AHS.

Members who are denied supplemental training requests should contact their Local or UNA Provincial Office (Phone: 1-800-252-9394; Email: ProvincialOffice@una.ca) and ask to speak to an Occupational Health and Safety Advisor.

UNA provides two full-day provincially funded OH&S workshops for members that sit on JWHSCs: OHS Basic & OHS Advanced. Check **DMS Events** for the most up-to-date workshop schedule and to register yourself for a future workshop. 🍷



[www.una.ca/
memberresources/
education](http://www.una.ca/memberresources/education)

□ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

season and your coworkers' holiday seasons to be focused on meaningful time with loved ones rather than dealing with illness. Regardless of changes in employer policy, safe work practices remain unchanged. At a minimum, we continue to recommend that you:

- Stay home when sick.
- Wear an N95 when dealing with potential COVID cases.
- Get immunized against COVID and influenza.

Happy holidays, and we hope to see you safe and healthy in the new year. 🍷

HOW TO APPLY FOR A UNA INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY FUND GRANT

UNA helps members contribute to humanitarian assistance abroad

■ **TWICE** each year, United Nurses of Alberta provides a maximum of 10 grants of up to \$1,000 to the union's members for the purpose of engaging in missions abroad that provide humanitarian assistance of capacity-building to a host community.

It's part of a long UNA tradition of supporting members in their efforts to engage in humanitarian assistance missions abroad.

UNA members can apply for the grant through UNA's DMS system. Successful applicants will be contacted through their @una.ca email and they must confirm receipt of that email by replying within 30 days of its receipt.

Applications must be received prior to travel.

Grant funds will be disbursed following the submission to UNA's second vice-president of a written report from the member about their humanitarian experience mission. The report must be submitted within 60 days of completion

of the humanitarian work. Selection criteria include the strength of the application with preference given to first-time recipients.

Important deadlines for applicants:

- Applications are due on May 15 and December 31 of each calendar year
- For travel between January 1 and June 30, applications must be received before December 31 of the preceding year
- For travel between July 1 and December 31, applications must be received prior to May 15 of the year in which travel occurs
- Applications are reviewed by the Membership Committee of UNA's Executive Board after the May 15 and December 31 deadlines

UNA members can read about the work of some International Solidarity Grant recipients in UNA's NewsBulletin. 🌸



The weather was cold, but spirits were high on November 27 as Alberta nurses joined the picket party for striking Canadian Union of Postal Workers members the Canada Post Mail Processing Plant in Edmonton.

After a full day of business at UNA's quarterly board meeting, members of the UNA provincial board and observers from across the province marched in solidarity with CUPW members striking for job security and respect from their employer.

From left to right, UNA's Executive Officers: President Heather Smith, Second Vice-President Karen Kuprys, First Vice-President Danielle Larivee, and Secretary-Treasurer Christina Doktor.



UNA remembers DECEMBER 6 and presses for action to prevent violence against women and girls

■ **EACH** year, United Nurses of Alberta remembers December 6 and continues to press for action to prevent violence against women and girls.

It has been 35 years since the vicious act of gender-based violence that took the lives of 14 young women at l'École Polytechnique de Montréal. On December 6, United Nurses of Alberta mourns the 14 engineering students who were murdered and recommits to reflect on the impact of violence against women in our society.

The anniversary of December 6, 1989, known as the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, also represents an opportunity for all Canadians to think about how reporting of violence against women has grown in recent years.

Communities and individuals must speak out. All levels of government must continue to be reminded of their responsibility to take meaningful steps to prevent all forms of violence against women and girls in Canada, including measures to restrict the possession and misuse of firearms.

Working on the front lines of health care, Alberta's nurses see the impact of violence against women, and sometimes experience it themselves in their own workplaces and homes.

**We remember each of the
14 young women who lost
their lives on December 6, 1989:**

Geneviève Bergeron

Hélène Colgan

Nathalie Croteau

Barbara Daigneault

Anne-Marie Edward

Maud Haviernick

Maryse Laganière

Maryse Leclair

Anne-Marie Lemay

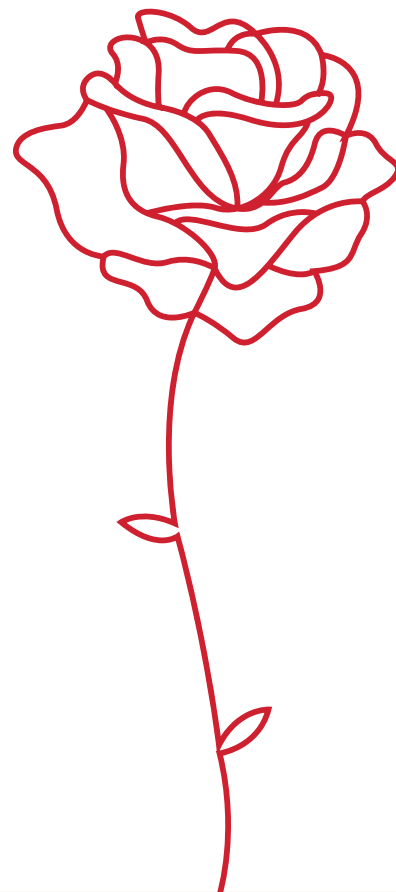
Sonia Pelletier

Michèle Richard

Annie St-Arneault

Annie Turcotte

Barbara Klucznik-Widajewicz 🍷



Changes at AIMCo prompt UNA members' pension concerns

■ **ALBERTA** public sector unions have a strong history of defending members' pension rights

The Alberta Government's sudden firing of the entire board of the Alberta Investment Management Corporation and the appointment of a partisan Conservative, former prime minister Stephen Harper, as board chair has sent shock waves through the investment industry and worried UNA members enrolled in the Local Authorities Pension Plan, which is managed by the Crown corporation.

Critics have called the shakeup a break with the respected Canadian model of pension management, which emphasizes the principle that pension funds should be free from political interference.

The Globe and Mail described the sudden change as "signalling a shift in governance" at AIMCo, "raising questions about its independence." *The New York Times* quoted a Canadian pension expert who called the termination of 10 directors (three of whom were later reinstated) as a "Soviet style" purge.

But UNA members concerned about the developments need to remember that Alberta's public sector labour unions have a strong history of successfully protecting their members' pensions from bad ideas promoted by past governments.

UNA has been a leader in defending LAPP benefits for more than 35 years.

Until the 1990s, the funds underlying Alberta's public sector pensions were treated as part of the province's general revenue.

Unions recognized the risk inherent in this approach and, with UNA

President Heather Smith in the forefront, pushed hard for segregation of the pension funds with control and investment directed by jointly trusted pension boards.

In 1993, that became reality, with \$3.5 billion transferred to the LAPP. With the growth in membership and investment returns, LAPP now has \$65 billion in the assets held on behalf of 300,000 Albertans. The LAPP Board has six union representatives and six employer reps.

In 2014, the Progressive Conservative government announced plans to significantly reduce LAPP benefits. Doug Horner, then the minister of finance (and a relative of current Finance Minister Nate Horner), claimed the plans were unsustainable and could only survive if pension benefits were reduced.

Public sector unions led by the Alberta Federation of Labour mounted a public campaign to defend the sustainability of the LAPP. Thousands of people marched on the Legislature. Union members spoke forcefully to their MLAs throughout the province.

In 2015, in the lead-up to an election, PC Premier Jim Prentice dropped his predecessor's plan and withdrew the changes.

UNA recognizes the danger posed by the current changes at AIMCo and will be active in pushing for good governance and appropriate investment of members' pension funds.

Meanwhile, all unions need the support of engaged and enthusiastic members, willing to channel their energy into the union and protecting their hard-won pensions. By standing together, we can succeed. 🍷



Photo by Remy Steingenderivative work via Wikimedia Commons

Stephen Harper

NURSES SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN PRESUMPTIVE COVERAGE FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL INJURIES

■ **UNITED** Nurses of Alberta calls on the Government of Alberta to include nurses in presumptive coverage by the Workers' Compensation Board for psychological injuries related to post-traumatic stress disorder and other traumatic mental health injuries.

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

Nurses should not be denied or forced to wait for access to Workers' Compensation benefits after experiencing traumatic events while on the job. This coverage is already extended to other first responders such as police, firefighters, emergency medical workers, dispatchers, and corrections officers.

The only obvious difference is that the professions whose members receive presumptive coverage are dominated by men, while in the nursing profession a majority of practitioners are women. This is discriminatory and unfair.

The needed change to the Workers' Compensation Act would require the WCB to presume that a confirmed psychological or psychiatric injury happened because of an incident at work.

UNA believes that this coverage should be extended to all nurses who hold a practice permit or are registered with a college of a regulated profession under the *Health Professions Act*.

If the Workers' Compensation Act is changed, nurses will have access to Workers' Compensation programs and treatment initiatives that will assist them in their recovery and get them back in to the health care workforce faster.



TELL ALBERTA MLAS TO INCLUDE NURSES IN presumptive coverage for psychological injuries

Contact your MLA to discuss why Alberta nurses should have preemptive coverage for psychological injuries. Visit www.assembly.ab.ca to find your MLA's name and contact information.

Meeting with your MLA

To meet your MLA, contact your MLA's constituency office and request an in-person meeting to discuss why this issue is important to you as their constituent and for nurses across Alberta.

Once you have arranged a meeting with your MLA, create a list of the most important points you would like to discuss. These should include:

- > Nurses are currently excluded by the Workers' Compensation Board from presumptive coverage for psychological injuries. Through the nature of their work on the front lines of the health care system, nurses are routinely exposed to traumatic events in the workplace.
- > Presumptive coverage for psychological injuries is already extended to other first responders such as police, firefighters, emergency medical workers, dispatchers, and corrections officers.
- > An amendment to the Workers' Compensation Act could extend coverage to all nurses who hold a practice permit or are registered with a college of a regulated profession under the Health Professions Act.

Be respectful and leave time for questions

The goal is to influence and help shape decision making. The MLA or a member of their staff will probably have questions, so get to the point and then have a discussion.

Thank the MLA for their time.

And remember to be persistent, patient, and request a follow-up meeting. 🍷



Remembering 'The Bluebirds'

Lest we Forget Canada's brave Nursing Sisters - Remembrance Day 2024

By Dave Cournoyer
Communications Advisor

■ **EACH** year on November 11, Canadians honour the sacrifices of those who serve in the Armed Forces during times of war, conflict and peace. On Remembrance Day this year, Alberta's Registered Nurses and Registered Psychiatric Nurses remembered the many nurses who have served.



Professional nurses entered the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps as Nursing Sisters in 1904 and were the first women in the British Empire to receive military rank. More than 2,800 Nursing Sisters served in the RCAMC during the First World War. Because of their blue dresses and white veils, they were nicknamed "The Bluebirds."

Most Nursing Sisters during the First World War served in England, France and the Eastern Mediterranean, where they provided skilled nursing care to the sick and wounded, often under enemy fire. At least 45 Nursing

Sisters had lost their lives by the end of 1918.

During the Second World War, more than 3,649 Nursing Sisters served, taking on increasing responsibility and risk close to combat zones in casualty clearing stations and mobile surgical teams. Medical units followed the soldiers on the front lines and were frequently within range of enemy artillery.

One Nursing Sister who made the ultimate sacrifice was Nora Hendry Peters of Cluny, Alberta, who died in Italy in 1944. Peters studied to become a nurse at the Calgary General Hospital and upon graduating in 1933 worked at the St. Michael's and Galt hospitals in Lethbridge.

She enlisted in 1942 and went overseas the following year. She is buried at the Caserta War Cemetery, 27 kilometres north of Naples.

Hundreds Canadian military nurses were decorated for their service in both world wars.

Veterans Affairs Canada describes the Nursing Sisters as "unyielding women who braved all the hardships of war to do their duty and care for their patients."

In 1926, the Nurses' Memorial commemorating the fallen Nursing Sisters was unveiled in the Centre Block of Canada's Parliament Building in Ottawa. The marble sculpture, located just outside the doors of the Parliamentary Library, was a result of years of advocacy by the Canadian Nursing Association and its provincial affiliates. 🍷

RESOURCES FOR MEMBERS

as negotiations continue

KNOW
your
Rights

■ **WITH** UNA's Negotiations Committee back at the bargaining table, now is a good time for members to reacquaint themselves with their UNA local's leadership and to think about ways they could help as negotiations continue.

A list of UNA locals is found on the website, UNA.ca at <https://www.una.ca/locals>. If you don't know your local and can't find it on the list, you can contact UNA switchboard at **1-800-252-9394** and ask for the information you need. Someone will help.

Information on the Locals List includes an email address for the elected executive members of each local. Members are encouraged to contact their local and, if they can, to offer their assistance.

As negotiations progress, locals that come under the Provincial Collective Agreement – those representing nurses employed by Alberta Health Services, Covenant Health, Recovery Alberta, Lamont Health Care Centre and The Bethany Group (Camrose) – will need volunteers to staff several sub-committees.

These include committees responsible for finance, picketing, emergency staffing services, member communications, and external communications during a labour dispute.

Picket line captains, reporting to the picketing committee, will also be required for each picket shift, in the event of a dispute.

ADDITIONAL IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION:

PROVINCIAL OFFICE

700-11150 Jasper Avenue NW
Edmonton AB T5K 0C7

(780) 425-1025/1-800-252-9394

SOUTHERN ALBERTA REGIONAL OFFICE

310-60 Uxborough PL NW
Calgary Alberta T2N 2V2

(403) 237-2377/1-800-661-1802

A tool kit with information resources for organizing information walks is found at <https://www.una.ca/memberresources/toolkit> 🍷



Report from
Director of Labour Relations
David Harrigan



Tool kit with
information resources
for organizing
information walks.

SMALLER UNA LOCALS RATIFY NEW CONTRACTS

■ **WHILE** many UNA members are focused on negotiations of the Provincial Collective Agreement, the union has successfully concluded bargaining and ratified new agreements for members working at a handful of smaller worksites.

New collective agreements were ratified for:

- Local 150 members at St. Michael's Long Term Care Centre in Edmonton
- Local 172 members at the Edith Cavell Care Centre in Lethbridge

- Local 219 members at Shepherd's Care Eden House, Shepherd's Care Kensington Village, and Shepherd's Care Millwoods in Edmonton
- Local 234 members working in the Paramedical/ Professional or Technical Capacity at Hardisty Care Centre in Edmonton

UNA congratulates and thanks the locals and their bargaining team members for their hard-work and solidarity during these negotiations.

UNA recognizes the hard work that the members do in getting the word out and canvassing their coworkers during this process. 🍷

NURSES NEED MORE THAN A BAND-AID



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>

