

# Provincial



**EQUITY,  
INCLUSION  
& DIVERSITY  
STRENGTHEN  
ALL OF US**

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The **new** Affordable BC  
podcast





# Postponement of the 51<sup>st</sup> BCGEU Constitutional Convention

On March 17, 2020, the provincial executive of your union unanimously made the extremely difficult decision to postpone the union's triennial constitutional convention, which had been scheduled for June 2020. This unprecedented decision was made in light of the rapidly changing situation we found ourselves in as the COVID-19 pandemic became a reality.

The authority for the provincial executive to postpone convention stems from Article 8.1(b) of the BCGEU Constitution & Bylaws. It allows for convention to be scheduled outside the parameters set out in the constitution in 'extraordinary circumstances'.

At the time we made this decision, the full extent of how COVID-19 would impact our lives was still largely unknown. However, we now know this was the right decision. Many of our members are facing this crisis on the front lines – working directly for government, in health care, in childcare, or any of the other jobs deemed essential for British Columbians. Trying to push forward with our convention would have been unconscionable.

Following the decision to postpone convention, our conventions staff was able to secure new dates for our convention in 2021. **The 51st constitution convention will now be held June 9-12, 2021 at the Hyatt Regency in Vancouver.**

The change in the convention date means we will be conducting new elections for delegates in early 2021. In addition, key deadlines for wishing to declare your intention to run for either a full-time officer or executive vice-president position, submitting names for life membership or honour roll and submitting resolutions will be re-set to comply with the constitution.

The following is a brief summary of what to expect and when:

**Late November/early December 2020** the convention call will be re-issued. It will set out key dates for resolutions and for submitting names for life membership and honour roll (names submitted previously will not need to be re-submitted);

**December 2020** the winter edition of The Provincial will contain information and deadlines related to candidates wishing to declare for one of the two full-time officer positions and the four executive vice-president positions;

**Early January 2021** local chairs and treasurers will receive new delegate entitlement numbers to allow them to elect delegates to convention. Delegate elections will need to be re-done as Article 8.1(c) of the constitution requires the provincial executive to determine membership numbers for the purpose of delegate entitlement not less than six months prior to the time of each convention. As a result of the pandemic, we expect some locals' membership numbers may be impacted which will, in turn, impact delegate entitlements. As a result, those entitlement will need to be recalculated and new elections conducted;

**Mid-January to mid-March** elections for delegates in locals, as well as the election of young worker, equity and bargaining council delegates;

**Early February** deadline for receipt of life member and honour roll resolutions;

**April 9, 2021** deadline for all general resolutions from locals, through components, must be received by BCGEU headquarters (Article 8.4 of the constitution).

More details will be available later in the year, but I hope the above will assist you in preparing for convention next year.

In the meantime, I hope you and your families are all staying safe and healthy during the course of this pandemic. At the time I am writing this, the picture is looking a little more optimistic, but we are not yet on the other side of the curve.

Stay safe. Although we are apart, we are in this together.

In solidarity,

Stephanie Smith  
BCGEU president

## SPRING 2020

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## MONEY LAUNDERING

**DO YOU HAVE INFORMATION TO SHARE WITH THE CULLEN COMMISSION?**

**EMAIL [INQUIRY@BCGEU.CA](mailto:INQUIRY@BCGEU.CA)**

In May 2019, the B.C. government responded to intense public pressure and created the Commission of Inquiry into Money Laundering in B.C. (The Cullen Commission). This pressure included a public advocacy campaign spearheaded by your union.

If you have any information related to the commission's mandate—whether you witnessed, heard about, or participated in incidents in your workplace—that you want to share please visit [publicinquiry.bcgeu.ca](http://publicinquiry.bcgeu.ca) or email [inquiry@bcgeu.ca](mailto:inquiry@bcgeu.ca)

# EQUITY, INCLUSION & DIVERSITY STRENGTHEN ALL OF US

It's no secret your union strives to be ahead of the curve on social justice issues. The BCGEU's work on equity and inclusion began when delegates to our 1993 convention voted to establish an equity and human rights committee. Today, the committee represents Indigenous workers, workers of colour, workers with disabilities and LGBTQI2S+ workers and has the critical job of advising our senior leadership.

**Equity roundtables - a promise kept**

Delegates to the BCGEU's triennial convention in 2017 passed a series of resolutions calling for roundtables of workers from three equity groups with our provincial executive passing a motion to hold a fourth. These gatherings were convened during the last year.

**Workers with disabilities roundtable**

This roundtable examined experiences in the workplace, union and community. Participants spoke about the continual demands from their employers to justify accommodations and time away from work. Others raised the lack of proactive accommodations and inclusion efforts by the union as a barrier to full participation in the BCGEU and labour movement. Many recommendations focused on bargaining, since collective agreement provisions often don't work for members with disabilities.

**Workers of colour roundtable**

This roundtable used artistic and experiential activities to support a collective learning environment. Participants sang, danced and rolled up their sleeves to produce a series of recommendations to address structural racism and bias. Delegates called for action to address the lack of racialized workers in leadership positions in your union and the labour movement.

**Indigenous workers' roundtable**

Twenty-three Indigenous members from different sectors attended, including some who work specifically in Indigenous-governed services, like Aboriginal child welfare and family services, the native court workers program, and friendship centres. Much of the discussion centred around a proposal to create an Indigenous advisory committee to guide your union in its efforts to embrace a variety of initiatives.

**LGBTQ2SI+ workers' roundtable**

Twenty-five members gathered to share personal experiences they've faced in their working lives as members of the LGBTQ2SI+ community. Discussion centred around ways your union can help members feel more supported in their workplaces, the union, and community. Recommendations were crafted to address hostile work environments and build networks to encourage and support each other.

**Leadership and staff training**

Your union's senior leadership participates in two days of joint learning annually. Their October 2019 conference was entitled, Building a More Inclusive Union. Workshops examined racialization, disability and LGBTQI2S+ rights, decolonization and reconciliation.

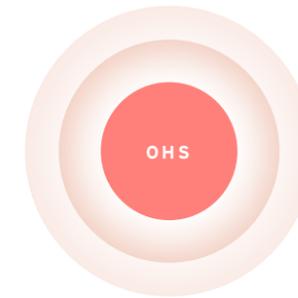
In December, BCGEU staff attended a workshop that invited participants to examine their own privilege and to use their power and privilege to promote justice, dignity and respect.

"As a progressive union, we have a responsibility to defend human rights and treat each other with respect, understanding and with equality. We are committed to taking steps to recognize barriers to full participation and identify areas where recruiting activists and staff from equity groups would make us more representative of our membership," said Joanna Lord, BCGEU executive vice-president and co-organizer for the 2019 Leadership workshop.

When standing together in solidarity we are rooted in the struggles of everyone. We still have work to do, but each step forward makes us a more diverse, inclusive and stronger union.



Reports from the equity roundtables are available at [BCGEU.CA/EQUITYREPORTS](https://bcgeu.ca/equityreports)



## BUILDING ON SUCCESS IN 2020

Your union has a deep commitment to protect members and that's why we're concentrating resources into growing our occupational health and safety (OHS) education programs.



**W**e offer courses for members who serve as OHS representatives, plus workplace mental health and anti-bullying training. The courses are delivered by OHS staff and an amazing team of 55 well-trained member facilitators. In 2019, we ran 258 courses and trained more than 2,300 people. Despite our success, we've got more work to do to make sure OHS representatives get all the training they need.

"Many of our OHS reps don't get the eight hours per year of training they're entitled to under the Workers' Compensation Act. In fact, fewer than half took a BCGEU course last year, so we know there is lots of room to grow. We want to ensure members know about our OHS courses and we want to make them as accessible as possible," said Doug Kinna, BCGEU executive vice-president and chair of the provincial executive OHS committee.

This is why we're taking steps to expand OHS education programming in 2020. We've added two new courses in women's health and safety in the workplace, and building effective committees. As well, we plan to offer courses in new locations. We're improving tracking of OHS committees and worker representatives so we can better communicate about our training program. And, we've created a new BCGEU OHS website that has details about our course offerings.

You can help your union spread the word about BCGEU OHS education. Find out more at [ohs.bcgeu.ca](https://ohs.bcgeu.ca).

I wasn't surprised that BCGEU members in our wildfire service eagerly responded to the call for help. Our firefighters will always lend their professional skills to any jurisdiction that needs assistance. In this case, the opportunity to return the favour to Australia was an additional incentive as their firefighters had travelled to B.C. to assist with our recent extreme fire seasons.

Rob Davis  
Component 20  
vice-president



## BCGEU WILDFIRE SERVICE MEMBERS ANSWER THE CALL FOR HELP IN AUSTRALIA

The images from down under are devastating. More than 11 million hectares or 110,000 square km of bush, forest and parks have burned across Australia. The 2019/2020 wildfire season has been the worst on record and has killed at least 33 people, including four firefighters. Fires continue to burn in many parts of the country.

Leanne Ingham, a BCGEU Wildfire Services member from BCWS HQ-Kamloops, was one of 51 BCGEU members who helped battle the wildfires that have ravaged the country. We recently caught up with Leanne after her safe return from a 38-day deployment.

### Where were you stationed in Australia and what was your role?

I was stationed in a small community in New South Wales and was part of an incident management team. The scale of the fires is remarkable. We literally hit the ground running and after one day of in-country orientation, were fighting fires right away. We got to work and focused on fitting in and being helpful from the start.

### What was the situation like on the ground?

The stress was really high, understandably. The day before I arrived, my team lost two firefighters who were crushed by a tree. It was such a tragedy and everyone had to just keep going.

But, the work doesn't stop and a fire stops for no one.

In Australia, ground firefighting crews are entirely volunteer. In New South Wales, there were 70,000 volunteers alone and there's a huge amount of support for them. There were ads on the radio, television and billboards thanking the firefighters. Everywhere we went, the people were so appreciative and supportive to us. We couldn't pay for a coffee!

### Would you do this again?

Absolutely. I felt like I made a difference. By the time we arrived, their people were just exhausted. There was a lot of emotion and stress. They were fighting fires around the clock and then, at the same time, worried for their own homes and families. Our job was to give them a break for the first time in weeks.

My deployment was over Christmas. It was strange to spend it in 46-degree weather. And we were so busy and so focused on such a stressful situation that I forgot it was a holiday. But, the camaraderie was wonderful. Everyone really pulled together and took care of each other to make it a really special experience.

I've worked with Australians in past wildfire seasons in B.C. It was so rewarding to be helpful for them in the same way they've been there for us.



Leanne Ingham (BCGEU BCWS member), Travis Smelski (Manitoba firefighting staff), Wendy Smith (Australian firefighting staff)



## BCGEU ACTIVISTS GATHER FOR THE NEW AND IMPROVED ORGANIZING ACADEMY

As snow piled up outside, a resilient group of BCGEU members gathered at Harrison Hot Springs for our second annual organizing academy, held at the Canadian Labour Congress' winter school.

Introduced in 2019, our organizing academy is designed to build direct member power in the workplace and a slight redesign has made the course even stronger. Our 2020 offering brings activists together in workplace-based teams to create cohesive and comprehensive internal organizing plans. Members taking part in this unique opportunity experienced skill building alongside their co-workers with the aim of taking their newfound strategy and learning back to their worksites as a team. Our organizing academy is part boot camp and part experiential workshop. It's challenging for participants but also a significant catalyst for growth.

Colleen Nelson from local 702 described her experience as: "a powerful opportunity to work with activists in my bargaining unit to build worker power and strategically address workplace issues. We had the opportunity to dig deep and develop a strong plan because we had a significant amount of time together, facilitator support, and access to resources. Our group's discussion was thoughtful and powerful. Together, we created a shared vision of what we would like to focus on in our workplaces and a plan that allows us to make and reach our goals. It was an opportunity to shape skills, mentor newer activists and strengthen personal relationships. We worked hard during the week and we're still working hard back at our worksites to build our team and carry out our plan. I'm really grateful for the opportunity."

Jen Seper, from local 702 shared, has similar praise: "it was a supportive, encouraging and empowering environment. Winter school was an incredibly valuable opportunity for participants to connect with each other, and under the guidance of BCGEU staff, plan how best to support members in their workplaces in coming together to make positive change."

The chair of BCGEU's education & scholarship committee, executive vice-president Joanna Lord, echoes this sentiment.

"There has to be a dedicated space and time to work through and outline long-term goals and strategies," she said. "This is the way to create a unified plan and shared vision for a workplace. The organizing academy provided this opportunity in a beautiful way. Participants were supported to highlight key issues in the workplace and strategize as a team to create an organizing plan that does not feel out of reach."

Complementing the organizing academy, BCGEU members joined their labour comrades from other unions in this year's winter school. They included women in leadership, labour economics, mental health first aid and building psychologically healthy workplaces. In addition, fundamental labour courses were provided, such as, steward training, labour arbitration, and facing management effectively. Tangible skill building were evident through courses such as parliamentary procedures & public speaking and transforming conflict into union activism.

Winter school is a great opportunity for BCGEU members to gain the types of skills and knowledge needed to make our union even stronger.

Participants were supported to highlight key issues in the workplace and strategize as a team to create an organizing plan that does not feel out of reach.

Joanna Lord

# THE BCGEU TALKS HOUSING CRISIS SOLUTIONS ON ITS NEW PODCAST

**W**e're on the air. Your union has just launched a limited series podcast called *Affordable BC*. It's part of our campaign for housing affordability and solutions we think will address a crisis that has impacted many of our members at work and in their personal lives. We've made a lot of progress since we first launched the campaign two years ago and the podcast is another way to keep you informed.

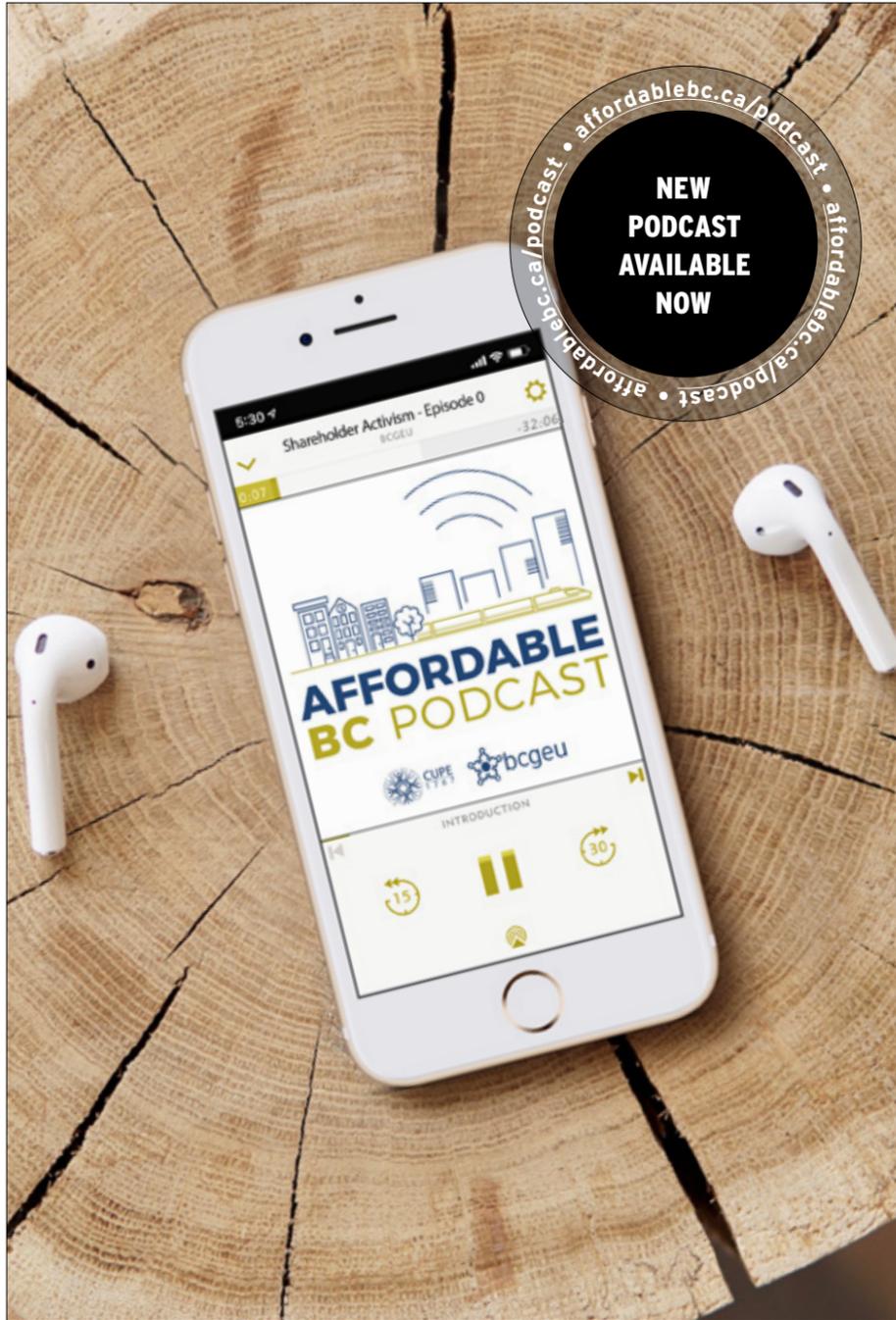
*Affordable BC* explores the crisis from difference perspectives - from how housing costs impact transition house services for women and children fleeing violence in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, to how we can fund affordable housing through land value taxation.

"The affordable housing crisis impacts our entire membership by inflating the cost of living and eroding the impact of wage gains we make at the bargaining table," said Paul Finch, BCGEU treasurer and host of the podcast. "We want to find new ways to communicate with and on behalf of our members, and we're excited about the potential of this podcast. Our goal is to bring a diverse array of stakeholders into the discussion, and to build the political will required to implement the policy solutions we've put forward to solve this crisis."

The show is also co-hosted by Kari Michaels, executive vice-president of the BCGEU and one of the leads on the *Affordable BC* campaign.

"This podcast is a great way to share members' stories and achievements with people in different communities who are also looking for ideas to address the crisis, or to even just let people know they aren't alone and to keep fighting," said Michaels. "Victory is possible."

**We hope you enjoy this first podcast series by the BCGEU, available now at [affordablebc.ca/podcast](http://affordablebc.ca/podcast)**



# ADDRESSING INJURY RATES THE HEALTH CARE SECTOR

**W**orkplaces are about to become safer thanks to the BC NDP government's recent commitment of \$8.5 million over three years to fund a new health and safety agency.

Injury rates for health care and social service workers had been on the rise since the BC Liberals shut down the Occupational Health and Safety Agency for Healthcare (OHSAH) in 2010. OHSAH was a provincially coordinated injury prevention organization.

**Your union, along with other health care stakeholders, urged the government to rebuild the agency during the last round of public sector collective bargaining.**

"The BCGEU represents thousands of front-line health care workers who too often risk their own health and safety in the course of their work," said BCGEU president Stephanie Smith. "This new agency will change that and it's just one more example of how this government is making life better for working people."

It's the employer's responsibility to provide a safe workplace. The rebuilt agency will support and enhance, not duplicate, work that employers are doing to meet their legislative responsibility. This will include delivering initiatives on the prevention of injury, as well as education and training for the effective functioning of local joint occupational health and safety committees - to name a few objectives.



Workplace injuries have a significant impact on health care workers and their families, sometimes for their lifetime. Returning to a coordinated approach to reducing injury in the health care industry is long-overdue. The new agency is expected to be operating by late spring. Your union will continue its involvement with the agency to represent the voice of health care and social service workers to make workplaces safer.

# STOP WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

**N**o worker expects to experience violence in the workplace when they accept a job, especially a position in the health sector. But, this is the reality for some of the BCGEU's 9,400 members in the Health Services Component.

Health services workers face a higher than average rate of workplace violence, which puts them at risk of not only physical injury, but burnout and mental stress as well. These factors can undermine their ability to provide the highest quality of care to their clients.

This must change. That's why our union has launched a new campaign to identify common

concerns when dealing with workplace violence in the health sector. The campaign features a video that profiles health services workers in Component 4 across a wide variety of worksites. Each member discusses the impact of violence issues in their respective workplace.

The campaign is being promoted through BCGEU's social media channels. There are also a series of shareable images and print posters, featuring portraits photos and quotes of Component 4 members.

"Violence in the health care sector is more prevalent than many people think," said Mahen Ramdharry, vice-president of the



Health Services Component.. "It's our hope that through this campaign, our members will feel seen, heard and empowered to deal with workplace safety issues."

**The video can be seen here: [bcgeu.ca/violence](http://bcgeu.ca/violence)**

# BCGEU FIGHTS BACK AGAINST A MASSIVE RENT INCREASE

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December 2019 was a date **Kian Gray** had circled in his calendar. It's when he expected to move into a brand new 22-storey high-rise that now stood in the place of an old three-storey walk-up that had been demolished in 2016. Gray and his husband had lived in Vancouver's west end for 17 years. The last three years in the Gastown neighbourhood awaiting the completion of the new building didn't feel the same. The couple was ready to go home to their west end community.

Story on next page →





**T**hey felt lucky with their situation as others attempted to navigate the housing crisis. The president of Reliance Properties, Jon Stovell, had personally assured them that all tenants displaced from the old building would be reunited in the new one. Stovell even signed a tenant relocation protection policy with the tenants that promised they could move back in at their old rent amount with a two-year rent freeze. The agreement felt secure, especially after it was reviewed by the City of Vancouver.

When the long awaited letter arrived from Reliance Properties about moving into the new building they were shocked. It outlined a new arrangement. They'd be paying their old rent amount plus an additional \$1,100 a month. Reliance said the tenants would get rebate cheques to honour the promised two-year rent freeze. But, in the third year, their rents would jump 90 per cent - far in excess of what's permitted under B.C.'s rent laws. Gray knew he couldn't afford this. He'd have to leave Vancouver, transfer his job, lose his seniority and take a significant pay cut. But not without a fight.

Gray, a BCGEU member, and his fellow tenants decided to organize and take their story to the media. They got some coverage but Reliance refused to budge. When he asked the BCGEU to stand with them to take on the developer, the *Affordable BC* team was ready to join the fight. Finally, Reliance Properties took notice.

*The Provincial* caught up with Gray to see what he thought of the experience:

**Why did you decide to reach out to your union for help?**

I read emails from the BCGEU on the housing crisis and knew our union was active on the issue. I was hoping that with the support of my sisters and brothers at the BCGEU, we could shine a brighter light on this fight for fair implementation of tenant relocation agreements.

**How would you describe working with the union on this?**

Honoured, amazed, supported. I have heard repeatedly from Vancouver city councillors and average Vancouverites that they have never heard of a union stepping up like this. I am almost speechless at how the BCGEU has made a meaningful impact on our situation. Doors have opened up and we've had meetings that we would never have happened if not for the BCGEU.

**Has this changed your perspective on the role of unions going beyond the bargaining table to play a role in larger social issues?**

Yes. The union has demonstrated it has a valid role in issues that go beyond the bargaining table. If union members can't enjoy safe, stable housing in their communities, they can't be effective employees in their workplaces. Stability starts at home.

**What do you hope you can achieve through your campaign for renters as the housing crisis continues?**

I hope that we can advance housing security for all working people so that we all have safe, affordable homes in the cities and communities we work in.

Gray is fighting, not only to stay in his community, but to prevent other renters from facing displacement when redevelopments occur. You can stand in solidarity with him by signing his petition at [affordablebc.ca/tenant-power](http://affordablebc.ca/tenant-power)



## BCGEU pushes Canadian banks to rethink role in private prisons

**Y**our union has scored an incredible victory for human rights. We've been hard at work since we submitted a shareholder proposal to the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) about their relationship with U.S. private prisons.

As a result of your union's efforts, RBC has announced it will not provide lending or financing services to U.S. private prison companies. Additionally, the bank says it will develop and publish a human rights position based on the requirements of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) by October 31, 2020. If RBC makes good on this promise, it will be the first Canadian bank to do so. We hope this will prompt the rest of the Canadian financial industry to follow.

U.S. private prison facilities operate the majority of detention facilities that currently detain migrant families and children. News reports have detailed frightening and inhumane conditions in these centres, including children sleeping on cement floors while suffering from hunger, inadequate health care, and abuse. Numerous deaths have been reported.

RBC has millions of customers around the world, manages nearly \$700 billion in as-

sets, and has more than 85,000 workers. With its recent announcement, it's the first Canadian bank committed to not doing business with a particular industry because of human rights concerns.

According to international research, Canadian banks rank among the lowest in the world on human rights issues. Thanks to your union's targeted shareholder activism, we could finally start to change that.

"Private prison companies have been at the centre of the appalling human rights crisis at the U.S. border, and as investors, we had the power to take action," said BCGEU president Stephanie Smith. "This action has delivered fantastic results. Not only has RBC committed not to do business with U.S. private prison companies, they've also committed to greater human rights disclosure and engagement."

Building on your union's success, we've asked Canada's other large banks to assess the risks of doing business with U.S. private prison companies. We intend to make their responses public. We hope to push the entire Canadian banking sector to end their relations with U.S. private prison industry altogether.

Your union holds a number of investments – including our strike fund – and shareholder advocacy is important to protecting them while also advancing human rights, labour rights, environmental rights and governance reforms in corporations. This year we've filed shareholder proposals with Bank of Montreal, CN Rail, Great West-Life, Restaurant Brands International, Loblaws, and Thomson Reuters. More are in the works. We're proud of the work we've already done to date, and expect to share more successes soon.

**"Shareholder advocacy is a major priority for the BCGEU. We invest our members' dues to grow our union and we make sure to leverage those investments to demand action from companies on the issues that matter to our members and all working people,"**

Stephanie Smith.



## GOING BEYOND THE PHYSICAL RISKS OF WORK

The size and quality of our OH&S team, the number and variety of training opportunities we offer, plus our practice of collaborating with employers to deliver training, makes us well equipped to support members' psychological health and safety.

Doug Kinna, BCGEU executive vice-president and chair of the provincial executive OH&S committee.

It's an alarming statistic. In any given week, 500,000 Canadians are unable to work because of mental health problems or illnesses. That's why your union's advocacy on occupational health and safety (OH&S) issues isn't limited to only the physical.

For years, the BCGEU has called for psychological health and safety (PH&S) supports in the workplace. To back this up, your union has taken a range of actions including:

- Creation of a mental health and addiction subcommittee of the provincial executive OH&S committee;
- Training for members and staff in mental health first aid, the working mind, and anti-bullying & harassment measures;
- Recommendations to the B.C. government's review of the workers' compensation system, including a call for better supports for injured

workers experiencing mental health issues;

- Lobbying the Ministry of Labour to amend the Workers Compensation Act and expand the mental disorder presumption regulation to include corrections officers, wildfire fighters and publicly funded health-care assistants;
- Participation in WorkSafeBC consultations on workplace violence prevention, including a call to strengthen bullying and harassment language; and
- Bargained with B.C. health authorities and public services to adopt the Canadian Standards Association's (CSA) National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace - the first organizational resource of its kind in the world. Our union, as an employer, has also adopted the standard.

Our impressive OH&S team, made up of staff, 54 OH&S member facilitators and 3,315 OH&S member representatives continue to encourage better PH&S at workplaces. We do this by delivering training, participating in workplace health and safety committees and joint steering committees, and calling for employers to implement the CSA's standard.

**There's more work to be done. This year, we'll offer more mental health training opportunities, including a new course specifically based on the CSA standard, distribute awareness posters, and continue lobbying to include more workers under the mental disorder presumption regulation.**

**STOP WORKPLACE VIOLENCE**

Medical Laboratory Assistant

**Health services workers face a higher than average rate of violence in the workplace.**

This puts workers at risk of physical injury, burnout and mental stress, therefore undermining their ability to provide the highest quality of care to their clients.

For resources and to learn more about the campaign, visit [bcgeu.ca/violence](http://bcgeu.ca/violence)

To help you get the answers you need,  
check out our COVID-19 information hub at

**BCGEU.CA/COVID**

- ? My income is being affected by COVID-19. What financial supports are available to me?
- ? What are my recall rights if I'm laid off during the pandemic?
- ? Do I need a doctor's note if I'm sick with COVID-19?
- ? What other resources are available to help workers and families at this time?
- ? What else is our union doing to support working people during the pandemic?
- ? I have COVID-19 and I think I contracted it while at work. What do I do?

