



President's Message

May 19, 2020

As many of you will have seen, SEIU-West has sent out a joint call with CUPE and SGEU for our provincial government to establish recognition pay to health care workers for the incredible work being done during this pandemic. It's important to recognize the extraordinary efforts that are being put into place right now, along with the skill and effort that each health care worker brings to the workplace every single day... regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We face short staffing; questionable provision of personal protective equipment (PPE); changing scientific advice, policies, and directions; and the challenge of working with an expired collective agreement.

With COVID-19, we've seen the chief medical health officer, Dr. Shahab, order cohorting for personal care homes (PCHs) and Long-Term Care (LTC). We have been able to address some issues around those orders through a Letter of Understanding (LOU) on Labour Pool. However, there are many more issues that are being raised on a daily basis by members across all sectors: group homes, retirement homes, PCHs that are not covered by the public health order.

We've been raising members' questions and concerns and seeking answers to correct what we see as inequities related to cohorting. There are many members who work two and three jobs strung together to make enough money to provide a decent living for their families. They work in the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA), PCHs, retirement homes, retail, and the community-based organization (CBO) sector. The provincial health orders that limit a health care worker to working in one LTC or PCH facility only make a significant impact on that member's total take home pay. SEIU-West and our partners have told SHA that we are opposed to our members – the same front line health care workers that the province is so dependent on – having to directly bear the costs of the government's plans to manage the pandemic through loss of income.

SHA has provided the following explanation as to how they will be cohorting and maintaining employment/wages for our members:

- Part-time and casual members who work in a SHA/affiliate facility and who have been cohorted to a PCH facility will be paid for their guaranteed hours, up to full-time hours. Guaranteed hours will be either the hours set out in the letter of appointment, or based on their average hours worked over the last six months. Based on a six month average.
- Part-time and casual members who work in a SHA/affiliate facility and have been cohorted to another SHA/affiliate facility or to a non-bargaining unit affiliate will be paid for their guaranteed hours differently. Guaranteed hours will be the hours set out in the employee's letter of appointment, or based on the hours scheduled within the posted and confirmed period that was in place immediately after cohorting went into effect.



As you can see, there is a significant discrepancy between how those two groups of employees will be able to maintain their income. If you're being cohorted from the SHA and its affiliates to a PCH you will receive remuneration based on the six month average. If you are being cohorted anywhere else, you do not receive the average, but receive your guaranteed hours and hours scheduled within the posted and confirmed period (which is invariably less hours than normal). Anyone who worked more than one job where they work more than full-time hours will not have their hours over full-time considered for reimbursement. As you can see, there's a good chance that you will make less money during the pandemic if you are cohorted. This is in contrast to the agreement the Ministry of Health (MoH) made with the physicians whereby doctors will receive extra monies if their income is reduced during the pandemic. This despite the fact that physicians also do not have a provincial contract with the MoH.

It is the SHA's intent that the guaranteed hours a SHA/affiliate worker transferred to the PCH would require the worker to pick up additional casual hours at the PCH equal to their guaranteed hours with the SHA/affiliate. This practice may well violate the terms of the collective agreements in place at the PCHs with respect to call-in and relief work, as there is no agreement between unions and the PCHs to modify the terms of their collective agreement(s).

The employer's rationale for the discrepancy in how employees will be compensated fairly is that members who are not cohorted and who are in SHA/affiliate facility departments where services have been ended or reduced may also suffer a reduction in pay. The SHA spokespeople ignore the fact that employees who are in non-cohorted positions have the ability to look to other facilities and other call in lists to get additional hours. As well, those employees have the opportunity to be redeployed as well as, through the broadcast blasts, pick up additional hours of work. All of these options are denied to cohorted workers. The idea that the way to make things fair is to reduce the pay of all SHA/affiliate employees is just ridiculous.

Warning: if you are now feeling queasy or confused after reading this, you're not alone!

SEIU-West members in SHA and Extendicare are without a collective agreement for three years. We've not received recognition pay for work done during this pandemic, as front line health care workers in Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec have. And now, under this SHA guaranteed hour scheme (scam?), our members are being told they will lose pay in order to continue to be available to provide care... if you aren't angry, you're not paying attention!

It appears that the SHA believes that there is a connection between respect and pay. They want to pay you less because they really don't respect the work you do. We will continue our fight to push back against that callous and arrogant attitude.

Respectfully,

Barbara Cape
President, SEIU-West