

Chronic Short-Staffing in LTC Housekeeping Puts Seniors at COVID Risk

Saskatoon – SEIU-West has recently received alarming news that understaffing in housekeeping staff may be putting long-term care residents' health and safety at risk.

“Our members are doing their best to ensure that residents, patients, clients, and the public who are visiting them are as safe as possible,” says Barbara Cape, President of SEIU-West. “But when you don't have enough housekeeping staff scheduled to work, it's nearly impossible to be successful at infection control.”

SEIU-West has been sounding the alarm on chronic short-staffing in all areas of the health care system in Saskatchewan for several years. With the COVID-19 pandemic still a very real factor, infection control should be a number one priority at all facilities, but especially long-term care homes.

“Frankly, the SHA and the government should be more concerned about our seniors, and anyone who is going to visit them now that we are in Phase 4 of the reopen plan,” Cape adds.

In the past two weeks alone five formal reports of short-staffing have been received from a long-term care facility in west-central Saskatchewan. Three of those reports refer to shortages of housekeeping staff. Housekeeping staff, a.k.a. Environmental Services Workers, are responsible for cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting all areas, equipment and floors in a facility according to established and enhanced procedures. They are trained to ensure that infection control, isolation techniques and universal precautions are followed.

“We have a process that asks members to send us a Workload Tracking Form whenever they experience short-staffing in their workplaces,” adds Cape, “because this is a major health and safety issue for our members and the patients, clients, and residents they care for. We've received more than 80 forms in the past month alone. And we know that this is just the tip of the iceberg, because the more short-staffed our members are, the less time they have to fill out workload tracking forms.”

“According to what our members are telling us, housekeeping staffing hours and training have not kept up with the increased precautions associated with the pandemic,” continues Cape. “For example, there's a 20-bed facility in western Saskatchewan that has no housekeeping staff scheduled on weekends. We think that this is a situation that needs to be remedied before the next outbreak happens.”

Service Employees International Union West (SEIU-West) represents over 13,000 people across Saskatchewan. They include people who work in health care, education, municipalities, community-based organizations, retirement homes and other sectors. They are joined by one colour – purple – and one union – SEIU-West. Visit PurpleWorks.ca to find out more about SEIU-West members.

-30-

For more information, contact:

Christine Miller, Communications Coordinator
Phone: 306-477-8733

