

Lab Testing Capacity – an Empty Promise

Saskatoon – Members of SEIU-West who work in provincial lab services want the people of Saskatchewan to be aware of their ongoing challenges in meeting the SaskParty government's promise of processing 4,000 COVID19 tests per day. This is the subject of an open letter sent today to Premier Scott Moe, Minister of Health Jim Reiter, Minister of Rural & Remote Health Warren Kaeding, Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) CEO Scott Livingstone, and SHA Laboratory Services Executive Director Lenore Howey (<https://bit.ly/33fmUtP>).

The letter asserts that health care and government leaders should not be making unattainable promises without first checking with the front line staff responsible for delivering them.

“Our members who work in Saskatchewan Health Authority lab services have been clear. For the last three years they have been reaching out to let the Minister of Health, their MLAs, and health care sector leaders know that they have too few resources,” says President of SEIU-West Barbara Cape. “Our population has ballooned; yet there are fewer lab personnel (including both Medical Lab Techs and Combined Lab & X-Ray Techs) in addition to ongoing equipment and training needs that have not been met. These undertakings only increase the stress within our lab sector membership who are already stretched to the limits of capacity. It’s demoralizing to all lab services workers when leaders demonstrate no support and have no real understanding or connection with the front line.”

Since August 10, there have been numerous promises from the Ministry of Health, Premier Moe and Scott Livingstone, all promising an increase in daily lab testing reports to the tune of 4,000 tests per day. Yet there has been no meaningful consultation with our lab members who are actually doing this valuable work, in the context of all testing, including COVID.

“The public needs to know if COVID testing takes priority, then other medical diagnosis will likely be delayed as there have been no new or added resources made available to do all of it in a timely fashion,” adds Cape.

It is important to note that SEIU-West members, including the SHA’s lab services workers, have been without a contract since March 31, 2017. The provincial government’s offer of 0%, 0%, 1%, 2%, and 2% won’t bring health care salaries up to par with other provinces, meaning we are not attracting qualified people to the sector in Saskatchewan.

“We need the politics to stop,” continues Cape. “Instead, let’s commit to a well-funded and robust health care system by meeting the needs of those on the front line who are trying desperately to fulfill the needs of their patients, clients and residents.”

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

