

A Need for Sustainable Solutions in Long-Term Care

Regina – While details continue to emerge, SEIU-West leaders and members have been both shocked and saddened as the daily heart-breaking reports are revealed about the extent of the outbreak at Extendicare Parkside, a long term care facility in Regina.

“We understand this disastrous situation has resulted in the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) assuming control of the day-to-day operations on a short term basis,” says Barbara Cape, President of SEIU-West. “However, we want to be clear that SEIU-West communicated with both the SHA and the Ministry of Health since the onset of COVID, and our consistent message has been appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) must be supplied, not rationed; and the standards and policies for the SHA need to be enforced across all public and private health care facilities. We are confident that understaffing is a major contributor to this situation.”

SEIU-West members have been relentless in their calls for safe staffing levels in health care – calls that have consistently been ignored or dismissed entirely by the SaskParty government, the SHA and private for profit home operators, such as Extendicare Canada Inc.

“It is gut-wrenching to see our members, my co-workers, who put their passion for caregiving first-while they put themselves and their families at risk,” adds Cape, who is also a Red Seal Chef from Parkside Extendicare. “Now too many are COVID positive as a result of their work. Our government should have learned from the Ontario experience.”

The SaskParty campaigned on a platform to hire 300 more Continuing Care Aides (CCA’s) and have indicated they are following through on that promise, but the question at the top of mind for health care workers is what are they actually doing to recruit new staff and retain the staff they currently have. It’s not obvious on the front line that anything has been done.

“Scott Moe, Health Minister Paul Merriman and the entire SaskParty government must pay attention – you cannot publicly declare that it’s your priority to maintain bars, restaurants, and casinos open at half capacity on one hand and, on the other hand, convey the seriousness of the public health disaster in our midst,” continues Cape. “Continuing to allow large gatherings such as the upcoming Rally at the legislature next Saturday with no consequences is a failure in leadership.”

SEIU-West members are dealing with tragedies on the front line at a number of long term care facilities because COVID is everywhere. Keeping our economy open comes at a cost that is being paid by health care workers and those they care for. Our government must be transparent and earnest in their efforts to recruit more staff in all health care settings like long-term care homes, as the only way to prevent this type of tragic occurrence in the future.

“There are a number of challenges for Extendicare that they need to address: how is it that they applied for federal government wage subsidies, and still paid dividends to their shareholders? How are they able to do that, but not negotiate a collective agreement for these workers who’ve been without a fair deal since 2017?” adds Cape.

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.

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