



For immediate release

March 8, 2021

## **Health Provider Unions call for immediate vaccination of all health care workers**

SGEU, SEIU-West and CUPE – three Saskatchewan unions representing health care providers – are calling on Premier Scott Moe to reconsider the government’s decision to exclude certain health care workers from being prioritized in the province’s COVID-19 vaccine roll-out.

The government’s original plan included only a small number of health care workers in its Phase 1 vaccine schedule. That was contrary to a December 2020 announcement, which indicated a higher prioritization for health care workers. Following significant concerns expressed by health experts as well as health care unions and associations, the government amended its plan for Phase 1 to allow for the vaccination of an additional list of health care providers, with the current plan allowing for priority vaccinations for approximately 60% of health care providers. However, many who currently work in hospitals, home care and community health care are still not prioritized to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

“It’s simply unacceptable that there are still so many health care workers at high-risk of contracting this disease because our government doesn’t see them as a priority in the COVID-19 vaccination plan,” said Sandra Seitz, President of CUPE 5430. “Those working in areas such as x-ray and laboratory services, dietary services, security services, therapy, patient registration, maintenance and environmental services – among others – are also at high-risk of exposure to COVID-19 and need to be protected.”

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) strongly recommended that all workers in health care settings be prioritized for the vaccine because of their close proximity to those who are likely to acquire COVID-19. Saskatchewan’s Chief Medical Health Officer Dr. Saqib Shahab has said getting more health-care workers vaccinated protects all critical areas of health care. Health Minister Paul Merriman has indicated that the provincial roll-out plan is based on an age-sequencing model, which was chosen based on a review of other jurisdictions and because it is the fastest way to deploy the vaccine.

“Despite recommendations by experts, it’s frustrating and concerning that the government has decided to pick winners and losers in the health care system when it comes to vaccinations,” said Barb Cape, President of SEIU-West. “It’s ironic that the Health Minister points to other jurisdictions who are making health care and emergency personnel a priority, yet Saskatchewan is selecting only certain health care workers for the vaccine in Phase 1, and putting a huge number of their colleagues on the backburner.”

Members of the public continue to express their appreciation for the work being done by those in the health care system, especially for their extraordinary efforts dealing with the

challenges of COVID-19. Premier Scott Moe has thanked health care workers for their efforts during the pandemic, going as far as calling them heroes.

“Although our members appreciate the government thanking us for our efforts and calling us heroes, the simple fact is that actions speak louder than words,” said Tracey Sauer, Chair of the SGEU Health Providers Bargaining Committee. “These heroes need to be vaccinated, and one of the best ways for the government to thank us is to ensure all those who work in health care and long-term care get the vaccine as soon as possible. That protects workers, their families and the patients, residents and clients in their care.”

Together, SGEU, SEIU-West and CUPE represent approximately 30,000 health care providers across Saskatchewan.

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