

# Bargaining Update



## FACILITIES

### Proposals for safer workloads, stronger OH&S language met with “underwhelming” response from employer

Against the backdrop of headline-grabbing staff shortages at Royal Inland Hospital and other health care facilities, health employers returned to the facilities bargaining table this week with disappointing responses to union proposals addressing the growing staffing crisis and rising levels of stress on health care’s frontlines.

The Facilities Bargaining Association had proposed stronger measures to resolve workload concerns, including those arising from unfilled vacancies and inadequate baseline staffing levels.

Recognizing high workloads, pandemic-related stress and other workplace hazards undermine the mental health of workers, the union bargaining committee also proposed a collaborative process to identify hazards related to psychological health and safety in the workplace.

But the employer rejected those proposals and others that would improve shop stewards’ availability to represent members and resolve workplace issues.

“In the face of a real crisis in our health care system, we have put forward concrete measures to tackle unmanageable workloads,” says HEU secretary-business manager Meena Brisard.

“We’ve clearly highlighted how these added pressures are burning out our frontline workers, putting the sustainability of our health care system at risk,” says Brisard.

“Health employers’ underwhelming response on these critical issues is really disappointing, and at odds with what our members experience every day on the job. We’ll continue to press employers at the bargaining table for solutions that will ease the pressure on the frontlines.”

In a recent HEU survey, three out of four health care workers reported experiences of pandemic-related burnout, and a further 64 per cent say their workloads have gotten worse during the pandemic. One in four say their employer rarely or never backfills positions left vacant by illness or vacation.

Health care workers continue to struggle with pandemic-related shortages, and are preparing for another summer of heat domes, fires and floods. But health employers provided a lukewarm response to the FBA’s proposals on pandemic and emergency disaster response, including a process for the redeployment of staff.

“The pandemic and multiple climate emergencies demonstrated how much our communities rely on our health care system,” says Brisard. “But they have also revealed a system under stress with workers at the breaking point. Health employers need to face this reality.”

The parties have scheduled bargaining dates through June. HEU is organizing a phone briefing on the status of negotiations for local executives in the facilities subsector later this month.

The nine-union FBA represents 58,000 health care workers.

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